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Iraq's children, portrait of the week by Bahgory 12

Danger deferred

THREE UN envoys began their diplomatic mission yesterday, aimed at defusing a US-Iraqi stand-off on expelling American members of UN weapons inspection teams. The mission was encouraged by Baghdad's decision to delay an order to expel the American team members until the UN Security Council meets to examine the results of the Iraq-UN talks and the UN decision to suspend U-2 surveillance flights which Iraq has threatened to shoot down.

Lakhdar Ibrahimi of Algeria, head of the UN mission, said a first meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Tarek Aziz was held in a positive atmosphere and he expected talks to continue for the next two days.

Although concessions were made by both sides, Iraq showed no signs of backing down, turning back teams of UN inspectors from sites near Baghdad for the third day running. *(see p.6)*

No progress

SENIOR Palestinian delegation member Nabil Shaath said no progress had so far been achieved in US-mediated negotiations with Israelis being held this week in Washington. He blamed the US for letting Israel evade its obligation to implement troop withdrawals and freeze settlement construction, Hoda Tawfik reports from Washington.

Under US pressure the Palestinian delegation was expanded to include experts dealing with technical issues concerning security and the projected Gaza airport, but Shaath said they are still insisting that troop withdrawal take top priority. A US State Department official expected the talks would last several days. *(see p.6)*

'Unjust bias'

SUDAN formally denounced new US sanctions imposed against the country as "unjust, aggressive and reflecting American bias against the just causes of Sudan." Junior Foreign Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail said, in a dispatch carried by AFP yesterday, that the sanctions reflected unjust American practices against states which take independent positions and refuse to succumb to its tutelage.

Under the order signed by President Clinton late Monday Sudanese assets in the US will be frozen, US trade with Sudan prohibited and financial transactions barred. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said the sanctions aimed at punishing Sudan for supporting terrorism and waging war against Christians in the south.

Tribal win

TRIBAL loyalties retained a strong grip on the Jordanian parliament, to judge by election results announced on state television yesterday. Tribal chiefs, many of them centrists, won 68 seats in the 80-member lower house, giving them an overwhelming two-thirds majority.

Independent Islamist candidates and their leftist allies won only 12 seats after the principal Islamist parties boycotted the vote, AP reported.

The results strengthened King Hussein's regime against leftist and Islamist opposition to his relations with Israel and the US. None of 17 women contestants (out of a total of 524) were elected, and only 44 per cent of those eligible voted, a lower turnout than in the 1993 poll. *(see p.6)*

Empowering the South

Egypt, determined to bolster South-South cooperation, is to host the G-15 summits in both 1998 and 2000. Nevine Khalil reports from Kuala Lumpur

President Hosni Mubarak, speaking to reporters yesterday after the closing session of the seventh G-15 summit in Kuala Lumpur, said Egypt has agreed to host the group's 1998 summit and now chairs the economic alliance of the world's leading developing nations. Mubarak was asked by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, the summit's president, to take the helm after Jamaica said it would not be able to host next year's summit. Jamaica's Foreign Minister Seymour Millings, who headed his country's delegation, said that domestic conditions could only accommodate a summit in February or March 1999.

"I welcomed the offer," Mubarak said. Egypt will also host the group's summit in 2000 and, as a result, will remain for three years on the troika which consists of the incumbent, outgoing and forthcoming chairmen.

Mubarak, who later departed for Oman for talks with Sultan Qaboos, affirmed that participation in G-15 summits should be at the highest executive level. One of the failings of the group, which brings together 16 developing countries with very promising economies, is that chief government executives are not dedicated to taking part in its conferences. "Representation must be at a high level because this will reflect the seriousness of the group," Mubarak said, drawing parallels with other alliances such as the G-7 group of industrialised nations, the European Union [EU] and the Organisation of African Unity [OAU].

Mubarak praised the deliberations at the Kuala Lumpur summit, saying that they were "serious and reflected awareness of international trends. Following this example, Cairo is going to busy itself with G-15 affairs by, among other things, receiving Indonesian President Suharto and Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir before it hosts next year's summit in May.

In an address to a closed session for the heads of delegations on the first day of the summit, Mubarak blamed hasty liberalisation policies by Asian countries for a currency crisis, adding that this "could be proof of the benefits of adopting gradual economic development and liberalisation." He called for a meeting of the governors of central banks and heads of financial market authorities of G-15 members to discuss ways of dealing with problems resulting from currency manipulation practices.

These practices, which wreaked havoc on a number of Asian capital markets, dominated the deliberations at the Kuala Lumpur summit. A statement issued on the summit's first day expressed the participants' "deep concern" over the latest developments in the international financial and capital markets.

A concluding communiqué noted that the growth prospects of the developing world "largely depend on their ability to participate positively in the emerging global economic system." The participants committed themselves to the globalisation process "which leads to a more equitable and sustainable pattern of development and rapid growth... reciprocated by a supportive, fair and non-discriminating international economic environment." The communiqué also called for greater access to the markets, capital and technology of the developed world "to further facilitate our already significant contribution to the global economy."

Mubarak said that in light of world economic trends, it has become clear that both North and South should work to "promote positive developments and contain the consequences... resulting from the widening gap between the two groups." Mubarak warned that economic liberalisation could "marginalise the interests of developing countries; therefore, it is imperative that our countries have equal rights in formulating the principles of this new order." He strongly objected to attempts by the developed world "to impose radical changes" on the production systems of developing countries as a "flagrant interference in our internal affairs."

Mubarak told the heads of delegations that attempts to open a dialogue between the G-7 and G-15 "did not receive an adequate response" from the group of industrialised nations, "even though there is a dire need for an effective dialogue." He noted that although developing countries honoured their commitments at the Uruguay round, the developed countries "continued to reduce Official Development Assistance which runs contrary to our common stand."

Mubarak also took the G-15 group to task because its efforts to promote South-South cooperation "fell short of our ambitions." He said that "practical and realistic plans" should be launched to increase inter-group trade and investment, adding that Egypt remains committed to "strengthening the role of the group."

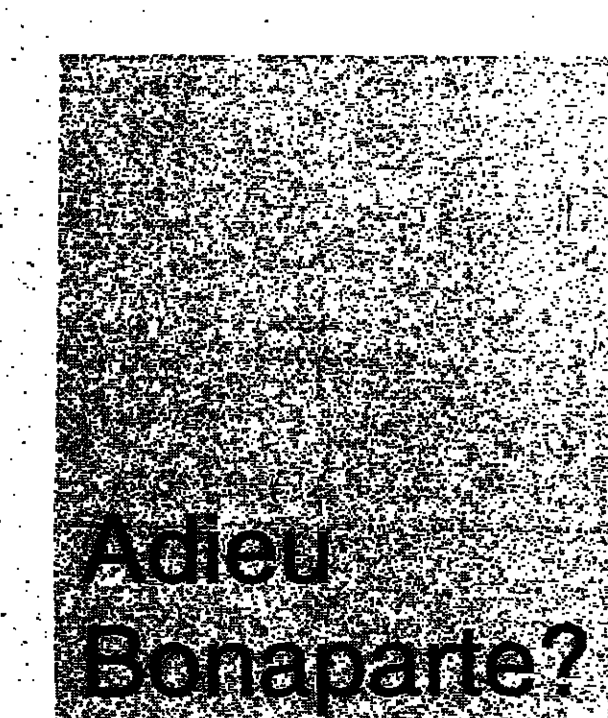
Prime Minister Mahathir announced yesterday that his country will host a December meeting of G-15 monetary authorities to draft currency trading rules in order to tame volatile currency markets. The rules will be put forward to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.

The meeting is to coincide with a conference of Asia-Pacific finance ministers which will also focus on ways of addressing the financial instability in the region, which has infected markets in the Americas and Europe.

"Whether the IMF can or cannot implement these rules is a separate issue, but we will make recommendations to the IMF," Mahathir told a news conference.

The G-15, formed in 1989 as a counterweight to the G-7, includes Egypt, Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Senegal, Venezuela and Zimbabwe. Kenya was admitted on Monday as the 16th member.

(see pp. 2&9)



Adieu Bonaparte?

Should Egypt celebrate Bonaparte's arrival on its shores? Omayma Abdel-Latif examines the controversy that surrounds the two-hundredth anniversary of the French expedition



Soldier or scholar — take your pick. Left, Napoleon rampant in Jean-Antoine Gros's version of the Battle of the Pyramids, now at Versailles, and right, in more contemplative mood, in Leon Cogniet's depiction of savants at work, now in the collection of the Louvre

The picture in an Arabic-language newspaper shows Napoleon Bonaparte standing with one hand in his pocket, his face set in the mask of the conqueror. A dedication next to the picture reads: "To those who want to celebrate the bicentennial of Bonaparte's expedition: the commanders of the occupation confessed to mass killings; the celebration is an offence to national sentiment. The printing press [which Bonaparte brought to Egypt] is gone now, but the bitterness remains."

This is but one incident in an ongoing campaign waged against a series of events being planned by the Egyptian and French ministries of culture to mark the bicentennial of Bonaparte's 1798 expedition to Egypt.

The campaign reached a new height this week, when another newspaper accused the organisers of "national treachery." In response, officials at the Ministry of Culture repeatedly stated that the planned events are intended to celebrate not just one isolated episode, but 200 years of cultural cooperation between Egypt and France. But as the barrage of criticism continued, the ministry, after weeks of haggling, finally decided to change the title of the celebrations from the syntactically invasive "France in Egypt and Egypt in France" to the more subtly punctuated "Egypt-France: Common Horizons."

The Egyptian and French ministers of culture will inaugurate the celebrations in December when they jointly reopen the Egyptian section at the Louvre.

While some intellectuals continue to oppose the very idea of celebrating the French expedition's bicentennial, others prefer to play down the controversy over what they see as above all another manifestation of an all-too-common animosity between Francophiles and Anglophiles. Yet others, although not opposing the celebrations, feel they should not be connected to the date of the expedition.

"It is not that we are opposed to celebrating the cultural relations between Egypt and France," said Ahmed Youssef, a Cairo University professor of international relations. "But linking the festivities with the date of the French expedition makes it look as if we were celebrating the occupation. People have to realise that the main objectives of the expedition were political and military, rather than cultural."

Youssef, author of a book on the expedition's adverse effects on Egypt, said that there is no historic evidence to support the claim that Bonaparte's invasion marked the nation's entry into a new era of enlightenment.

Jean-Pierre Corteggiani, deputy head of the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology, conceded that the expedition was primarily of a military nature. "But it is also true that it was the starting point of the positive cultural relations that still bind the two countries together even now," he said.

"We French people like to commemorate this type of event. For us, Egypt is like a dream. Some people may not like to celebrate the expedition because it reminds them of painful things, but we have also to remember its positive aspects," Corteggiani told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Critics, however, argue that most of the celebrations are planned to take place in 1998, which is the bicentennial anniversary of the expedition itself, and not of any of the cultural achievements with which it is retrospectively credited. This, they say, amounts to glorifying the colonial rather than the cultural dimension of the relationship between France and Egypt.

"[Such people] see [our mutual relations] in terms of imperialists versus nationalists, because in their minds the three-year expedition is associated with resisting an occupying force," explained Ghislaine Alleaume, the French assistant-director at the Centre d'Etudes Documentaires Economiques et Juridiques (CEDEJ). "It is quite difficult for them to see any connection between the activities of enlightenment which took place 20 years after the expedition and the expedition itself."

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, political writer and commentator, said the planned celebrations simply reflect the desire of the two countries to reinforce their already friendly relations. To lay the controversy to rest, Sid-Ahmed suggested that the celebrations be delayed until 1999, "which is exactly 200 years after the Rosetta stone was found. In that way, the celebrations would be associated with a cultural event," he said.

"It's a bit too late," was the response of Mohamed Ghoneim, first under-secretary at the Ministry of Culture. A final decision has been taken to begin the celebrations in December "and extend them right up to the year 2000, so we can avoid the debate about whether or not we are celebrating a conquest. It should be made clear that we are celebrating cultural ties of a special nature between the two countries," he said.

Cultural events forming part of the celebrations will include the restoration of various old *beits* in Fatimid Cairo and the opening of a new French cultural centre, to be named after the former French President Georges Pompidou.

"This is a way of exchanging new cultural and artistic trends between Egypt and France," Ghoneim told the *Weekly*. "The time factor [the date] which triggered the controversy has been eliminated. We are celebrating two cultures, two civilisations that have been interacting through the years."

Alleaume believes that the controversy is basically a matter of semantics — "should we say 'celebration' or 'commemoration'?" She suggested that Egypt and France should take the opportunity to rewrite this chapter of their common history.

"The two peoples are history-lovers. Scholars from the two sides should sit down together to discuss this part of their common history. The dispute over to 'celebrate' or to 'commemorate' is something that can be solved," she said.

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President Hosni Mubarak engaged in talks with Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov

New warmth in Cairo-Moscow ties

Primakov's Cairo visit had a much broader agenda than salvaging the peace process, writes Dina Ezzat

Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov concluded a Middle East tour last week by visiting Cairo, where he engaged in talks with President Hosni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa.

Primakov, who served as *Pravda's* Cairo correspondent in the 1960s, is well known in the Egyptian capital, where he maintains a wide circle of friends among the country's intellectual and political figures.

Reasserting Russia's role as co-sponsor of the Middle East peace process was, as expected, high on the agenda of talks between Mubarak, Moussa and Primakov. But no less priority was given to such important regional developments as Iran's emerging economic and military might, Turkish-Israeli military cooperation and its impact on neighbouring Arab states, particularly Syria, as well as Federal Russia which shares borders with Turkey. The talks also covered a Russian attempt to strike a balance in the regional power play, which is currently tilted greatly in America's favour. Moreover, the two sides discussed future economic cooperation between Egypt and Russia.

Overall, Cairo and Moscow shared similar views.

"We had important and elaborate talks," Moussa told a joint news conference last Thursday. He said the talks "covered various issues and problems related to the Middle East and bilateral relations. We also held discussions about a number of strategic issues that go beyond the peace process."

According to a diplomatic source, "the discussions were really very good. There were obvious similarities in the ways Egypt and Russia saw the main issues related to the future of the region."

On Iran, the two sides seemed to agree that the emerging economic and military might of the Islamic Republic does not pose the type of threat to regional stability that the West, particularly the United States, is trying to project.

At the news conference, Primakov affirmed that Russia is not boosting Iran's "missile capability." But he also said that Russia "is not going to go back on its current policy of pursuing the development of its political and economic relations with Iran."

Apparently, this was welcome news to Egyptian ears because, despite serious political differences with Iran, Egypt apparently would not like to see the Iranian military machine suffer the same fate to which the Iraqi arsenal was reduced since Operation Desert Storm in 1991. "This would only mean that Israel is left as the sole military superpower in the region," a source said.

Earlier this year, Iran was reported to have offered to cooperate militarily with Egypt, in an apparent effort to neutralise the Israeli threat. Cairo threw cold water on the reports, but Middle East watchers believe that future cooperation has not been ruled out completely.

Egypt and Russia also agreed that Turkish-Israeli military cooperation could be a serious threat to regional stability. To the delight of the Egyptians, Primakov said that "Turkish-Israeli relations have an aspect that goes beyond bilateral relations and that will have reflections on the situation in the region. These relations are focused on military issues and this does not lead to stability in the region."

In what appeared to be an indirect reference to the effects this cooperation may have on Syria, Russia's traditional ally in the region, Primakov warned that if the Turkish-Israeli relations proved to be an obstacle in the way of a peace settlement, "then we would have to go ahead and work against the growth of these relations."

Moscow, apparently, has fears of its own regarding the possible development of an Israeli-Turkish military alliance which may threaten its ties with Muslim members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, while Cairo's reasons for wariness are even more obvious. Egypt would not like to see Israel's military might, with its nuclear monopoly, become even stronger, and has apprehensions that an Israeli-Turkish military alliance could be used to pressure the Syrians into accepting an unfair settlement.

Primakov openly blamed the deadlock in peacemaking on Israel. He said the world "should not stand with folded arms, watching the political power play in Israel," without doing something to save the peace process.

Primakov also declared that President Boris Yeltsin planned to appoint deputy foreign Minister Viktor Posuvaluq as a special envoy to the Middle East.

"This is a good step because, although it is true that the Russians are not going to play the big role played by the US in the region, they can still do something about counterbalancing the US unipolar influence in the region," said an Egyptian diplomat who asked that his name be withheld. He argued that unlike the limited contribution made by the European Union's envoy Miguel Moratinos, the Russian envoy can do more. "He will have a freer hand because he represents one policy, unlike Moratinos who is doing all that he could, given that he has to worry about the 15 member-states of the EU and their different positions on the Arab-Israeli conflict," the diplomat said.

On the bilateral front, the two sides touched upon economic cooperation, which was the focus of President Mubarak's visit to Moscow last month. The volume of trade between the two countries, which stood at $1 billion before the collapse of the Soviet Union, has declined to $420 million, of which 90 per cent are Russian exports to Egypt.

A joint committee has been formed to provide counsel to governments and businessmen about new opportunities and a conference will be organised by the foreign ministry early next year for the same purpose.

By all standards, Egyptians and Russians agree that Mubarak's visit to Moscow, Primakov's visit to Cairo and Yeltsin's expected visit in April have breathed new warmth into bilateral relations.

Looking for the businessmen

Egyptian businessmen travelled to Malaysia, in the company of President Mubarak, to look for trade at the many events running parallel to the G-15 summit. Nevine Khalil went to look for the businessmen

On the sidelines of the G-15 summit in Kuala Lumpur this week, Egypt and Malaysia signed nine economic cooperation agreements, most of which were joint ventures worth millions of dollars. But a poor showing by the Egyptian private sector in the business fora running parallel to the conference rather took the shine off this important achievement.

Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim officiated at Tuesday's signing ceremony. The main items covered by the agreements included private sector joint ventures in the fields of furniture production and marketing, cooperation in the field of electronic and information technology, an agro-industrial complex at East Oweinat, production and marketing of Egyptian floor tiles, a palm oil refinery, a tyre production line, the privatisation and management of El-Amiriya Spinning and Weaving company, car production in Egypt and cooperation in high-tech industries. A memorandum was signed concerning consultancy on tyre manufacture, and a day earlier, an agreement for the privatisation and management of the Alexandria Shipyard.

Ganzouri said that it was time to act on the G-15 principle of increased South-South cooperation. "The nine agreements are for real and solid cooperation with Asia," he said. The volume of Egyptian-Malaysian trade, which stood at around $130 million in 1990, has almost doubled to $250 in 1996. But the trade balance is heavily tilted in Malaysia's favour. Egyptian exports account for a meagre $7 million, while imports from Malaysia are worth the remaining $243.

The participation of the Egyptian private sector in the business fora accompanying the summit, which include a trade exhibition and private sector business workshops, left much to be desired. The Kuala Lumpur gathering attracted nearly two dozen Egyptian businessmen, but their presence was merely a drop in the ocean, in the midst of all the activity going on around them. In the course of a two-hour discussion, President Hosni Mubarak chastised the participants, telling them that the private sector should be better prepared for overseas exhibitions. Mubarak also told the government bodies concerned to "supervise the quality of future exhibitions, to ensure that they reflect the scope of Egyptian industry."

All 16 members of the G-15, except for Venezuela and Senegal, took part in the trade exhibition, which was designed to promote networking among the different countries' private sectors. Some 144 governments and companies had stands — only three of them Egyptian. A wide range of products were on show, ranging from telecommunications equipment through building materials, handicrafts, cosmetics, processed food, chemical products, and industrial equipment to automotive parts and components.

After a 10-minute inaugural address, Prime Minister Mahatir Mohamad, champion of "less-talk-more-action", made a two-hour tour of the exhibition. At the Egyptian pavilion, which occupied a palatial 48 square metres out of the exhibition's total 135,000 square metre area, Mohamad was able to see the past, present and future of Egypt. The pavilion included a government area, managed by the cabinet's information and decision-support centre, featuring products financed by the Social Fund for Development. The private sector exhibitors were Little Egypt, a small company selling Egyptian antiques and handicrafts in Malaysia, and Eye on Egypt, the Malaysian agent for Ceramica Cleopatra.

Although the only pavilion to boast an impressive computer-assisted information system, the number of Egyptian exhibitors was dwarfed by the contingents from other countries. Algeria's pavilion housed 51 companies in a space six times as large as Egypt's; Peru showcased 26 companies, Mexico 14 and host-country Malaysia 10.

Lack of organisation, last-minute decision-making, and a whopping $250 per square metre rent were the causes of this inadequate representation. President Mubarak himself said that he had hoped for a more substantial presence from the Egyptian private sector. While telling the young owner of Little Egypt "good for you" for taking the initiative to set up shop in Malaysia, Mubarak later said that higher profile participation was required in future. "We must use this opportunity to showcase our industries," he told reporters.

Nonetheless, the pavilion received hundreds of visitors, including dignitaries like Algerian President Liamine Zeroual, who showed an interest in the handicrafts, and Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who said he was "very impressed" by the Egyptian display.

Effat El-Shoki, director of international cooperation at the cabinet information centre, said that her office decided to use computers instead of printed matter as a more efficient form of publicity. "Instead of carrying stacks of brochures from Cairo, we thought we could use the language of the age and so we brought computers along instead," El-Shoki told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Her section of the Egyptian pavilion was intended not only to promote Egypt as the land of the Pharaohs, "but also as a contemporary society with a vision to the future." Concrete manifestations of the "Egypt past, present and future" theme included CD-ROM visits of the Egyptian Museum, Egypt's gigantic development projects such as Toshka and information on Egyptian industry. Visitors needed only to ask for a print-out of what interested them, whether it was the number of paintings that hang in the Abdin palace or the latest economic figures, and they received a neat colour document within seconds.

Hatem El-Kilani, owner of Little Egypt, seized the opportunity to display a sample of Egypt's handicraft industry. Starting up with a capital of $10,000 three years ago, El-Kilani began by selling his products from door to door. Now he owns three shops selling imported Egyptian ornaments. Working with eight other Egyptians, all relatives, and three Malaysians, his profits are continuously multiplying and he plans to open two more shops soon.

In addition to the exhibition, a G-15 business workshop was organised to enable the private sector of the G-15 countries as well as non-member states to network and establish links. The workshops included topic and country presentations, business consultation meetings and match-making opportunities.

Egypt made its presentation to one of these workshops on the eve of the summit's opening, but the event left much to be desired and comparisons were quickly made with Brazil's rather more impressive presentation the day before.

Although detailing Egypt's economic reform programme, incentives for investment, facts and figures about the Egyptian economy and world reports on its achievements, the presentation did not catch the imagination of the listeners. Both Egyptians and non-Egyptians clearly felt that the event, which had been put together at the last minute, and without access to audio-visual facilities, was too long-winded and too formal in style to have much chance of grabbing the audience's attention.

Cairo and Khartoum opt for dialogue

A visit to Cairo by Sudan's first vice-president may open the door to the gradual elimination of the remaining differences between the two Nile Valley neighbours

After many months without high-level official contact between Egypt and its southern neighbour, Sudanese First Vice-President Al-Zobeir Mohamed Saleh paid a brief visit to Cairo last week where he met with President Hosni Mubarak, reports **Dina Ezzat**. Observers were taken by surprise by this gesture, coming as it does in the context of strained bilateral relations in recent years.

Statements made after the meeting by Sudanese State Minister for Foreign Affairs Mustafa Osman Ismail and Presidential Adviser Osama El-Baz were couched in very general terms, but reflected a common wish to surmount differences between the two countries. Ismail said any problems between Egypt and Sudan should be solved by dialogue. El-Baz said the "specifics will be addressed later... We need time to make progress."

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said afterwards: "It is only natural for Egypt and Sudan to work on resolving their differences."

The impression in diplomatic circles is that the outcome of the visit was good; good enough, in fact, for more high-level visits to be expected soon, albeit not too soon.

According to a diplomatic source who requested his name be withheld, "the talks were frank and open: they touched on all the issues that currently cast a shadow over basic strategic relations between Egypt and Sudan."

Some officials suggested that during the visit the Sudanese side offered several gestures of good will — sufficient for the Egyptian side to feel able to respond.

Relations between Cairo and the Islamist government in Khartoum have been difficult for some time now. "When President Omar Al-Bashir seized power in 1989, his regime maintained decent relations with Egypt at first, although they lacked the usual warmth. This phase did not last for long, however, and [the Sudanese government soon] began to make trouble for Egypt in a way that the Egyptian government could not ignore," an official told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Underlying the dispute is the desire of Hassan Al-Turabi, the power-behind-the-throne in Khartoum, to assert his spiritual leadership over the Arab world. Turabi once said he could not achieve this without gaining "control" of Egypt, one way or another.

Shortly afterwards, Sudan aggravated matters further by deciding to give refuge to Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, leader of the militant Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya. He appeared on Sudanese state television in 1993 to announce that he would work to turn Egypt into an Islamist state, affiliated to Sudan. Abdel-Rahman is now serving a prison term in the United States.

Following Abdel-Rahman's television appearance, the situation went from bad to worse. Egypt played host to Sudanese opposition figures and Sudan was said to be involved in backing Islamist militants seeking to undermine the Egyptian government.

Both governments began to criticise each other in public in the harshest possible terms. The situation escalated further when Sudan chose to revive a border dispute over the Halayeb triangle, which is generally acknowledged to be Egyptian territory, but has been left under Sudanese administration by mutual consent.

Sudan next appropriated a certain amount of Egyptian property, including the Khartoum branch of Cairo University. Then, to cap it all, the Khartoum government chose to provide refuge to three militants who were involved in an abortive attempt on the life of President Mubarak in 1995 in Addis Ababa.

Since then, Egypt has made any improvement in relations conditional on Sudan moving to extradite the three men so they can face trial in Ethiopia. Egypt's essential demand was that Sudan should provide information about the whereabouts of the three men.

Yet diplomats say Egypt never wanted to push matters beyond the point of no return. "We just made it clear that Sudan's involvement in anti-government militant activities had to stop," a diplomat said.

The two governments concede that they have common interests — water resources, economic development, security — that are so closely inter-related that neither side would like to tamper with them. This good sense appears to be prevailing now — if only for the time being.

"In the strategic sense, Egypt and Sudan are one entity," a diplomat said. "It is very true that Egypt considers that Sudan's northern border is Alexandria and Egypt's southern border is Juba."

Sources suggested to the *Weekly* that relations might "return to normal" once the file on the Islamist militants has been closed — a goal which now appears to be within reach. But does this mean that Egypt would then be prepared to send an ambassador to Khartoum to fill a post that has lain vacant for several years? As yet, there is no answer to this question.

Another question concerns Egypt's decision to provide refuge to Sudanese opposition leaders. Explaining the Egyptian position, an official said: "We are firmly committed to maintaining the territorial integrity of Sudan. We are not taking sides; we want a strong and united Sudan with which we can work closely to further the interests of both our peoples."

Fasting and feasting via satellite

The Mufti of the Republic has come up with the idea of an 'Islamic' satellite to make it possible for Muslims everywhere to synchronise their religious watches. He spoke to Mona El-Nahhas

After many years of persistent differences, Muslims will at last be able to celebrate their festivals at the same time the world over — if and when the "Islamic satellite," a brainchild of Sheikh Nasr Farid Wassel, the Grand Mufti of the Republic, becomes reality. The idea is to launch a satellite, at a total cost of $5 million, devoted exclusively to monitoring the birth of the crescent moon that marks the beginning of the lunar months of the *hijra* or Muslim calendar. As soon as the crescent is spotted by a telescope aboard the satellite, a live image will be relayed to all the Islamic countries, informing them that a new lunar month has begun.

Islamic scholars have always been divided on this issue. One school of thought, which is a minority, insists that a lunar month does not start in a certain country until the birth of the crescent is spotted in that country's sky. The majority opinion, however, is that the lunar month begins in each country once the crescent has been seen in the sky of any Muslim country that shares part of the night with it. As he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Wassel does not just support the latter view, but believes that all Muslims are obligated to agree with him. In his eyes, the other theory is simply a throwback to an age without rapid means of communication.

According to Wassel, the satellite "will monitor the birth of the crescent in every Muslim country and then transmit a live image of it to ground stations around the world. In this way, all Muslims will be able to observe the birth of the crescent with their own eyes at exactly the same time. They will also be able to start the Ramadan fast on the same day, as well as observing other religious occasions at the same time as each other."

The feasibility study for the project was carried out by Mervat Awad, a professor of astronomy at Cairo University. She says that by rising above the dense layers of the earth's atmosphere, the satellite will be able to identify the moment of the birth of the crescent clearly, and the pictures that it takes will not be blurred by air pollution. "This is what will distinguish the satellite from the telescopes that are currently used, and whose view may be obscured by clouds, vapours or pollutants," she said.

Awad said that in addition to the telescope, the "small" satellite will be equipped with computer, control and communication systems.

Before moving into action, however, Wassel intends to invite Islamic scholars from around the world to give their opinions on the project at a special conference, the date and location of which have not yet been fixed.

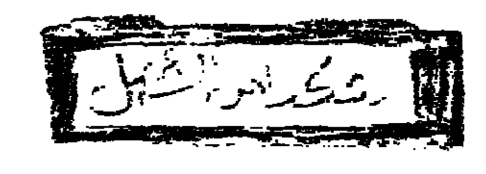
Once the approval of Muslim scholars from around the world has been secured, public subscriptions will be invited. "We thought that it would be best to give all Muslim countries an equal opportunity to participate in such an honourable project which aims to help forge a united Muslim front," Wassel said. "We have opened accounts at the Faisal Islamic Bank and the National Bank of Egypt to accept donations from Muslims everywhere."

Wassel said the feasibility study, as well as the relevant maps, have been sent to several international satellite-manufacturers. "Now, we are waiting for their response," he said.

An outline of the project has also been sent to the governments of all the Islamic countries, and Wassel is confident it will meet with their approval.

However, Ahmed Rayan, a professor of comparative jurisprudence at Al-Azhar University, cautioned that no action should be taken until the approval of all the Islamic countries has been secured. He added that if there was opposition, then the idea should be scrapped, because of its exorbitant cost.

Yehia Ismail, a professor of *Hadith* (the Prophet Mohamed's sayings) at Al-Azhar University, welcomed the project as a further move towards unifying the Muslim world. But he said the approval of the Islamic countries should be received in writing, so as to constitute a binding contract.



Parliament readies for a vigorous session

As the People's Assembly embarks on its third session, **Gamal Essam El-Din** previews the parliamentary agenda and, below, spotlights one of the forthcoming session's hotter issues

Following a five-month summer recess, the People's Assembly will open on 12 November the third session of its five-year term. At the opening procedural sitting, Fathi Sorour, in all probability, will be re-elected as assembly speaker. He will be the first to hold the post of speaker for an eighth consecutive year in Egypt's 131-year parliamentary history.

Sorour's re-election will fly in the face of a hostile press campaign that took him to task for too many, and too long, visits to foreign countries and also for alleged use of double-standards in stripping deputies of their parliamentary immunity.

Sorour will be nominated to the post at a special meeting by the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) on the eve of the Assembly's new session.

Ahmed Abu Zeid, leader of the NDP's parliamentary group, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Sorour was unanimously chosen during an Arab Parliamentary Union (APU) conference in May to serve as its chairman for a two-year term starting in January. "This makes Sorour an uncontested candidate for the post of assembly speaker," Abu Zeid said.

If Sorour's re-election appears to be a foregone conclusion, pressure is mounting on the Assembly to change the chairmen of at least two of its key committees. Last summer, and for the first time in the nation's parliamentary history, the chairmen of the economic affairs committee, Mustafa El-Said, and of the plan and budget committee, Tewfik Abdou Ismail, were stripped of their immunity so that they might be investigated for alleged financial malpractices. The anti-Sorour press seized upon the development to charge that MPs were using their immunity to venture into the business world and make hefty profits.

The fact that two more NDP deputies lost their immunity during the summer recess added fire to the campaign. The two are Ahmed Abu Shadi, who is accused of forging the sale contract of a car and issuing a bad cheque, and Khaled Mahmoud, who is being investigated on suspicion of involvement in a murder committed during the last parliamentary elections. This was the second time that Mahmoud had lost his immunity. He is standing trial at present along with a group known as the "loan deputies" for allegedly obtaining big loans from banks without putting up adequate collateral.

Yassin Serageddin, leader of the parliamentary group of the opposition Wafd Party, accused the Assembly's committees of poor performance which he blamed not only on the increasing involvement of NDP deputies in the business world, but also on the fact that many of them are government bureaucrats. "The Assembly includes 215 deputies who are civil servants and public sector employees. This kind of deputy can never exercise effective supervision on the government," Serageddin told the *Weekly*.

Sameh Ashour, the sole representative of the Nasserist Party, accused the Assembly of passing certain laws with surprising speed. As a result, 93 laws passed between 1971 and 1996 were declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Constitutional Court, he said. Mohamed Moussa, chairman of the Assembly's legislative committee, retorted that none of these laws was passed during Sorour's term as speaker.

Moussa is a candidate for the post of deputy speaker, which fell vacant following the death of Ahmed Hamadi in February. Amal Othman, former minister of social affairs, is also a candidate for the same post. The other deputy speaker is El-Sayed Rashed.

The summer recess also witnessed the birth of a group of 12 independent and opposition deputies, who are calling for the boycott of Israeli and American goods. Ayman Nour, a Wafdist member of the group, said it will urge the government to halt any further normalisation of relations with Israel under the 1979 peace treaty.

Following the procedural sitting, the Assembly will plunge into business. Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri said last month the government is anxious to see a number of key economic draft laws passed by the Assembly in its new session. He said the government's policy statement to the Assembly will be a "landmark" because it will amount to a "new social contract between the government and the people."

The new economic legislation will cover export promotion, unifying and facilitating investment regulations and fighting dumping practices on the local market. They will also include an anti-trust law to fight private business monopolies.

The government is also expected to submit to the Assembly two long-awaited legislative measures on raising the rental values of housing apartments in old buildings and a new labour law regulating relations between workers and employers in a market economy.

A third bill, which the government is expected to submit, provides harsher penalties for the mushrooming phenomenon of street thuggery. The new law will penalise thuggery as a felony, punishable by up to life imprisonment.

For their part, the Assembly's committees are already in action. The education committee, at a stormy meeting last week with Higher Education Minister Moufid Shehab, debated his decision to shut down the Cairo branches of two American universities. A meeting of the health committee next week to debate conditions in government-run mental hospitals is expected to be equally stormy. The subject assumed special importance following an attack on a tourist bus in September by a man who had escaped from a mental hospital.

The Shura Council, which will also open a new session simultaneously with the People's Assembly, is expected to hold an extensive debate on press publications that print and distribute locally on the authority of foreign-issued licences. Speaker Mustafa Kamal Helmi said the Council will examine the possibility of amending Press Law No 96 of 1996 with the objective of reining in these newspapers, which are often accused of sensationalism.

New bill to break old rent ceilings

In the latest break with the socialist laws of the '60s, the government drafted a bill this month that deregulates the old landlord-tenant relationship by gradually raising the rental value of housing apartments in old buildings. Under a socialist law still in force, the government maintained the right to fix, and even reduce, rental values. While denying landlords the right to evict tenants, the law enabled family members to inherit rent contracts indefinitely.

After liberalising rents of apartments in newly-constructed buildings last year, the government has now turned its attention to old buildings. The new law, drafted by a Housing Ministry commission, raises the monthly rental values for apartments constructed before September 1952 six-fold. In other categories, depending on the date of construction, rental values are trebled or quadrupled. In the lowest category, the rents of apartments in buildings constructed between 1977 and 1996 are raised by 10 per cent only. These increases will remain in force for three years, at the end of which all rental values will be raised by five per cent every five years.

The new bill, which is expected to be submitted to the People's Assembly in its new session opening on 12 November, prohibits tenants from sub-letting apartments they lease, unless they obtain the prior approval of the landlord.

Mohamed Ali Hassan, chairman of the Assembly's housing committee, claimed that the government's recent application of a law that liberalised the relationship between agricultural land owners and tenant farmers was successful, but said that housing was a more sensitive issue.

"The agricultural law affected half a million tenant farmers only," he said. "Besides, farmers can stand losing their land, particularly since small-scale agricultural work is no longer a profitable business," he said. "In housing terms, however, things are very different. Nobody can afford to lose his apartment and, at present, there are 12 million people who have been living for many years in leased housing units."

For these reasons, Hassan said, any new housing law should be the subject of discussion by all sectors of society before it is passed by the Assembly.

Housing Minister Ibrahim Suleiman, in reaction to press comments on the new law, affirmed that it does not give landlords the right to evict tenants. "The law mainly aims at creating a balanced landlord-tenant relationship, especially since a large number of people in major cities now pay under-valued rents for spacious apartments," Suleiman said.

According to Hassan, the old laws calculate the annual rent accrued from an apartment building at seven per cent the value of the real estate. "This is a very low return, compared to a 12 per cent interest rate for state treasury bonds," he said. Worse, monthly rents for old apartments overlooking the Nile may range between LE10 and LE20, while a newly-built apartment on the fringes of Cairo may be leased for between LE50 and LE150, he added.

Hassan found the draft bill ambiguous on the issue of whether the rent contract may be inherited and also on who is responsible for the building's maintenance — the landlord or the tenants.

The housing committee which he heads has drafted a rival bill that raises rental values by between 15 and 40 per cent, depending on the date of the building's construction. The increases will remain in force for five years, at the end of which rents in all categories will be raised by 10 per cent every five years, Hassan said.

Yassin Serageddin, leader of the Wafd Party's parliamentary group, recommended a cautious approach. "As far as I know, apartment buildings subject to old lease contracts account for roughly 75 per cent of all apartment buildings in this country," he said. "This means that the majority of the population could be directly affected by any liberalisation laws."

He said inflation and living costs should be taken into account when calculating the rent increases which should mainly target buildings in upper-class districts as well as spacious apartments.

Mahmoud Mahfouz, chairman of the Shura Council's public services committee, described the new bill as a "long-awaited step in the right direction. I hope that the government has finally come to the daring conclusion that deregulating the tenant-landlord relationship for old apartment buildings is the revolutionary step towards a real and concrete solution to the housing crisis," he said.

Rights groups demand action on war crimes

Four Egyptian and Arab organisations have joined forces to draw the world's attention to the issue of Egyptian POWs who were murdered while in captivity by Israeli forces during the 1956 and 1967 wars. **Amira Howeidy** reports.

Dozens of Egyptian prisoners of war and civilians were tortured, physically abused or simply killed by Israeli troops during the 1956 and 1967 wars. But the world only came to know of the atrocities two years ago, when Israeli newspapers published statements by Israeli officers confirming their involvement in the brutalities. Although the news triggered official and public outrage in this country, four non-governmental organisations said last week that not enough is being done to bring the perpetrators to justice.

The four NGOs — the Arab Organisation for Human Rights (AOHR), the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR), the Federation of Arab Journalists and the Federation of Arab Lawyers — held a conference in October entitled "Israeli war crimes against Arab POWs and civilians."

"Egyptian public opinion has not been informed yet of the results of the investigation of these atrocities or the actual facts behind them," said Mohamed Fayek, the AOHR's secretary-general. "The atrocities Israel committed against Egyptian POWs were also committed against hundreds of Arab POWs in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine."

Fayek said Arab governments should act to raise the issue at the UN General Assembly.

At present, there are two sources of information about the atrocities. The first is the series of testimonies and confessions made by Israeli officers and soldiers and published by various Israeli newspapers. The second is a 200-page EOHR report, entitled "Crime and Punishment," that documents the brutalities with facts, figures and eye-witness accounts.

When the atrocities were first disclosed nearly two years ago, the Egyptian foreign ministry asked the previous Israeli Labour government to open an investigation. According to ministry sources, an Israeli investigation committee was formed at the time but has yet to report on it findings. Egypt also expressed reservations over the choice of General Shlomo Lahat, who held various leading military posts in Sinai following the 1967 war, to head the committee.

According to Ahmed Abul-Kheir, a former adviser to the foreign minister who now heads the Friends of Human Rights Association, any interest Israel had shown in the matter dropped with the election of Binyamin Netanyahu as Israel's prime minister more than a year ago. "The Labour Party was responsive to the Egyptian request, but somehow this changed with the Likud take-over, which was accompanied by counter-accusations that the Egyptian army killed Israeli war prisoners, too," Abul-Kheir said.

He added that although "the file is not exactly on the shelf," the current tension in Egyptian-Israeli relations does not provide the appropriate climate, in his opinion, for raising the issue right now.

But according to Mohamed Bassiouni, the Egyptian ambassador in Tel Aviv, the POW file "has never been closed, delayed or forgotten." The only reason the issue has become low-key, he said, is that the Israeli inquiry committee has not completed its investigation and, as a result, the Israeli government has not yet presented the Egyptian government with any findings. "We are following up on any developments and we remain very concerned and keen on having the results," Bassiouni told *Al -Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview.

Bassiouni brushed aside Israeli claims that Egyptian soldiers also killed Israeli POWs. "There is no evidence, whatsoever, to support these claims," he said. "The Egyptian government has always shown respect for the Geneva Convention. I myself fought in four Middle East wars and never heard of these allegations."

For the organisers of last month's conference, mobilising public opinion is the only way to pressure the Egyptian and Arab governments to raise the issue again. "It is very ironic that we found out through the Israelis about the killings and now we are waiting for them to guide us to the type of action that we should take," EOHR Secretary-General Mohamed Mounib told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "If the Foreign Ministry is waiting for the Israeli committee to finish its investigation, then let it wait until doomsday."

Mounib said the EOHR has sent a copy of its report to Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, "expressing the hope that it will prove of value in assisting the ministry with documentation and the collection of data," Mounib said. Copies were also sent to several members of the People's Assembly. "We received a letter from the Assembly's information office requesting additional information, but we don't know if this means that they will take some kind of action," Mounib added.

The four organisations have formed a committee that will pursue documentation of the killed POWs in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine. "We want all those governments to reveal all the information they have on the killing and torture of Arab POWs and civilians," said Fayek.

Tahrir killers welcome death sentences

Two brothers, who killed nine German tourists and their Egyptian bus driver, appeared unrepentant after a military court sentenced them to death last week. **Shaden Shehab** was there to hear the verdict



Saber and Mahmoud Farahat listening to the judge before sentence was passed *photo: Nur Sobeih*

A military court last Thursday sentenced to death Saber and Mahmoud Farahat for an attack with petrol bombs and bullets against a tourist bus, in which nine Germans and the Egyptian driver were killed. The presiding judge said the two brothers deserved an even worse punishment, had one existed.

Six accomplices were convicted of providing the bus assailants with weapons or teaching them how to make the primitive bombs and were sentenced to between one and 10 years imprisonment with hard labour. A seventh was found innocent.

The death sentence against the two brothers, aged 32 and 24, was expected because they were caught at the scene of the crime in Tahrir Square and had pleaded guilty to the charges of premeditated murder and using violence and terrorism to undermine the national economy. Moreover, the two had not sought the assistance of a defence attorney. When the court appointed lawyers to defend them, the two refused to talk to them.

The seven accomplices had pleaded not guilty. The verdicts were handed down 16 days after the opening of the trial on 14 October and six weeks after the 18 September attack on the tourist bus outside the Egyptian Museum.

Upon hearing the sentence, Saber and Mahmoud Farahat hugged each other in their iron cage and repeatedly shouted *Allahu Akbar* (God is great) and *Al-Hamdu Lillah* (thanks to God). The six convicted accomplices wept bitterly.

Members of the defendants' families were not allowed inside the courtroom and had to wait outside to inquire of journalists what the sentences were. When a younger brother of the two Farahats was informed by *Al-Ahram Weekly*, he exclaimed: "A death sentence for both!". Then he asked sadly: "Were they happy?"

When the news was passed to their mother and sister, the two women broke into tears, but said they were weeping for Mahmoud, not Saber. "Let Saber die. He brought this on himself and on Mahmoud," the mother said.

Before the verdict was handed down, the two assailants appeared relaxed, although they were aware that the death sentence was almost certain. Saber told reporters that a "death sentence would be like a feast day. We are only individuals. What about states such as America and Israel which kill unarmed people with tanks and machine guns?" He added: "I did not do this for money or for personal gain. I did it for God and Islam."

In pronouncing the sentence, the judge, who cannot be named under military law, said the crime was committed by "a blood-thirsty person... Satan has possessed the soul of the first defendant [Saber]."

The judge went on: "Islam is a religion of equality and justice. But these men have turned the word of truth into lies in order to kill innocent souls. The maximum penalty is not sufficient for them."

The military prosecutor had asked for the maximum penalty against all nine defendants so as to discourage terrorist attacks targeting Egypt's tourism industry.

Immediately following the attack, authorities had described Saber as mentally disturbed, but the prosecutor said that a "medical report proved he is responsible for his actions and is not mentally deranged."

There is no appeal against sentences handed down by a military court. The only recourse the brothers have is to ask President Hosni Mubarak for clemency. But Osama Mahmoud, Saber's lawyer, said they have no intention of doing so.

"They think that what they did is right," he said. "Their longing for death is stronger than their wish to live. They think that they will be martyrs."

When the trial began on 14 October, Saber said his only regret was that the victims of the attack had not been Jews. He said the attack was an act of revenge for a cartoon drawn by an Israeli woman depicting the Prophet Mohamed as a pig.

"My brother and I are martyrs [for Islam]," Saber said from the cage where he and Mahmoud were held.

"Europe, the United States and Israel are all plotting against a new enemy called Islam, so when we kill those infidels, it shows there are men who can do what the regime can't, which is protect Islam," Saber told reporters at the time of the attack.

Saber said he upheld the ideology of the militant Jihad group, although he was not one of its members. Jihad has been officially accused of assassinating President Anwar El-Sadat in October 1981.

In a statement earlier this month, the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya hailed the two brothers as *mujahideen* and said they "acted in accordance with what their religion and belief dictate. They did not fall backward and retreat as some others did," the statement said. "*Allahu Akbar* [God is great], for the spirit of Jihad has spread throughout our country and among the various factions of our people."

In April 1996, Gama'a militants shot and killed 18 Greek tourists they mistook for Israelis outside the Europa Hotel on Pyramids Avenue in Giza.

On 27 October 1993, Saber opened fire on a group of foreigners inside the coffee-shop of the Semiramis Hotel. Two Frenchmen and an American were killed and another American, a Syrian and an Italian were wounded.

Saber was not put on trial at the time because an examination by psychiatrists at the government Abbasiya mental hospital, under the supervision of hospital director Dr Sayed El-Qott, diagnosed him as schizophrenic. Saber later said that he bribed El-Qott to get himself certified mentally ill, a charge which El-Qott denied. Saber was confined to El-Khanka mental hospital as of 27 January 1994.

The investigation into the bus attack has revealed that Saber used to bribe doctors and nurses to allow him to leave and return at will.

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The LE60 million Nubia museum in Aswan will be opened in a grand ceremony attended by President Hosni Mubarak

The Nubian face of Egypt

The Nubia museum in Aswan will be opened to the world later this month in a grand ceremony attended by President Hosni Mubarak, international dignitaries and archaeology buffs. Omayma Abdel-Latif takes a sneak preview

If any monument could serve as an adequate symbol of Nubian civilisation, it must be the newly-built Nubia museum in Aswan. The LE60-million-museum, which features more than 1,800 works of art spanning 5,000 years of Nubian history, will be opened by President Hosni Mubarak and Mrs Suzanne Mubarak at the end of this month. Mubarak will be joined for the opening ceremony by UNESCO Director-General Federico Mayor and the culture ministers of France and Italy. These are the two countries which made the largest contributions to the UNESCO campaign in the 1960s to salvage Nubian monuments which were threatened by flooding following the construction of the High Dam.

In preparation for the grand opening, Culture Minister Farouk Hosni made a two-day tour of the site to oversee last-minute preparations. "The opening of this museum is a reflection of the government's new policy of devoting greater attention to the development of the south," Hosni told reporters on Sunday.

Nubia has a "special status in Egyptian history," Hosni said, and the building of the museum is an important move to reflect the "riches of its culture."

Expressing the same view, Gaballah Ali Gaballah, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said the museum will not only showcase Nubian civilisation "but will also situate it within the framework of its mother civilisation. The two cultures are shown as fully integrated," he said.

Gaballah rejected a foreign press report which described Nubia as the homeland of an African people who later conquered Egypt. "Geographically, the south has always been an integral part of Egypt but, historically, a different kind of civilisation took root there," he said.

However, he added, "this did not set Nubia apart from the rest of Egypt. Nubia has been closely linked with Egypt throughout history."

Gaballah also rejected claims that the museum was built mainly to attract tourists. "This is not a money-making machine," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "The museum's collection aims at highlighting the cultural diversity of this country, which set its apart from the rest of the world."

Only two weeks away from the official opening, work continues to add the finishing touches. The 1,800 items which the museum houses are all in place. An electronically-operated gate, in the form of a typical Nubian house gate, and a state-of-the-art lighting system have been installed. Labels identifying the objects are provided in both Arabic and English.

During the tour, Hosni told reporters that Mubarak was intent on shifting attention southwards, not only in terms of economic development, but also in terms of cultural development. "The south is where Egypt's past and future meet and mingle," he said.

Hosni described the programme that has been meticulously planned by the museum managers for Mubarak and his guests.

The president will first unveil a plaque marking the official opening of the museum. Then he will watch a 10-minute film which depicts the various stages of the museum's construction.

Mubarak and his entourage will later proceed to the lecture hall, where they will be treated to another 15-minute documentary, prepared by UNESCO, that contains rare footage showing how the Nubian monuments were salvaged.

The dignitaries will then visit an exhibition hall where the collection of Haqaib, a deified Nubian nobleman, has been given pride of place. This collection, which up till now was locked away in the storeroom of the Elephantine Museum, includes some 150 unique Middle Kingdom objects discovered by archaeologist Labib Habachi in 1945.

As they enter the main exhibition hall, the dignitaries will be greeted by a rare, eight-metre-high statue of Ramses II, who extended Egypt's influence far into Nubia.

Mubarak and his entourage will then tour the main exhibition halls, where 1,800 works of art are on display. There are also 86 panels, providing information on the different groups who lived in Nubia at different times, as well as on Nubian life from pre-historic times to the present. There are also dioramas providing a vivid image of modern Nubian life.

The collection includes the oldest human skeleton ever found in Egypt. It comes from the Kobania area of West Aswan.

The dignitaries will also listen to the recitation of a text written in Meroitic, which recounts the victories of the Nubian people.

Finally, the president and his guests will move on to the outer courtyard, where they will attend a gala festival of Nubian music and dance by Nubian singers Hamza Alaeddin and Mohamed Mounir.

A typical Nubian home (photo: Antoune Albert)

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Expat papers defrozen

THE INFORMATION Ministry has decided to allow 41 newspapers, which were suspended last month, to resume publishing, provided they meet two conditions, reports **Gihan Shahine**. The 41 newspapers, relatively little-known and with limited circulation, are printed and distributed in Egypt on the authority of foreign licences.

According to Lutfi Abdel-Qader, chief of the ministry's publications and press department, these newspapers — if they want to resume publishing — should print in a free trade zone and should be run by a chief editor who is a member of Egypt's Press Syndicate. Abdel-Qader affirmed that the government does not intend to close down any of these publications.

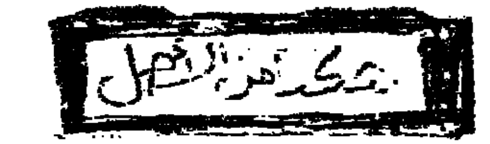
Five of the suspended papers, which met the ministry's two conditions, have already resumed publishing. The main problem the others are facing is that their chief editors are not members of the Press Syndicate.

In ordering the suspension of the 41 papers last month, Abdel-Qader said the newspapers had violated the law by failing to print in a free trade zone to avoid the payment of customs duties.

The publishers of these newspapers acquired foreign licenses, usually Cypriot or British, after failing to obtain local ones. According to the 1996 law, newspapers other than the national and party press can only be published by a public company which has at least 10 shareholders. The capital of a newspaper should be no less than LE250,000 for a weekly and LE1 million for a daily. All the members of the editorial board should also be members of the Press Syndicate.

"We simply couldn't comply with all these strict conditions and thus had to buy a foreign licence," said one publisher.

"The foreign-licensed publications which are distributed and printed inside Egypt and are owned by Egyptians are treated differently from those which are both foreign-licensed and foreign-owned," said Abdel-Qader. "Those owned by Egyptians should comply with certain local regulations."




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Expat papers defrozen

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Desert storm tidings

The American administration was prepared to wait until the UN diplomatic mission returns from Iraq this weekend before taking into consideration any further options. **Thomas Gorguissian** reports from Washington



Thousands of Iraqis demonstrating in front of the UN headquarters in Baghdad bearing banners and portraits of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. The protesters set fire to American and Israeli flags, and chanted anti-American slogans before being dispersed by police. Iraq announced yesterday it will extend a deadline it set earlier for all American UN arms inspectors to leave Iraq *(photo: Reuters)*

According to Pentagon officials, Washington will determine its action against Iraq's alleged defiance of the Security Council resolutions after the return of the UN mission sent to Baghdad by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in attempt to defuse the crisis.

Another factor which may determine the options open to Washington depends on the information gathered by the US deployed U-2 spy planes, and the Iraqi reaction to them. Will Baghdad fulfil its threat of shooting down or at least shooting at the American spy planes, used by the international monitors? After meeting with the UN Security Council on Monday, Richard Butler, the head of the UN special commission in charge of eliminating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, said that reconnaissance flights would continue as scheduled from Wednesday to Friday, despite Baghdad's threat. That threat was described by Bill Richardson, the US representative to the UN, as "irresponsible".

Also on Monday, President Clinton's senior national security advisers met to assess the situation and, it was reported, to review possible scenarios and options for the coming days if *Iraqi President Saddam Hussein continues to challenge UN* authority.

In Washington, James Rubin, the State Department spokesman reiterated the administration's stand of "not ruling out any option". He also said that what Saddam must do is, "to get the message, to change his mind, to reverse his position." Rubin emphasised that the diplomatic mission, which arrived in Baghdad yesterday, was not there to begin dialogue, but to deliver a clear message that Baghdad has to comply with UN resolutions.

The United Nations spokesman, Fred Eckhard, said that "there is nothing to negotiate. This is a diplomatic effort to diffuse a very dangerous situation. The next step is up to Iraq".

On 29 October, the Iraqi president ordered the expulsion, within one week of 10 Baghdad-based American weapons inspectors working for the United Nations weapons inspection team.

Last week, when the crisis started, Washington was at pains to stress that the threat was directed toward the United Nations, not the United States. Thus, it is up to the Security Council to take firm actions to force Iraqi compliance. This position was stated clearly by Bruce Riedel, National Security Council Adviser to the president on near East and south Asian affairs. He told foreign reporters in Washington that "the Iraqi government has again chosen to challenge UNSCOM and the international community. There should be no uncertainty in Iraq about what the Security Council is insisting Baghdad do: reverse its action and comply immediately and fully with its obligations. This is not an attack on the United States. This is an attack on the United Nations and the very fundamentals of the UN system and the regime that was created after the Gulf War."

Meanwhile, observers here agreed that the administration's senior officials, including Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Secretary of Defence William Cohen, were attempting to play-down the tensions and called for the diffusion of the crisis by diplomatic means.

At the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, top Republican and Democratic congressional leaders urged a quick response, including possible military action, if Iraqi President Saddam Hussein continues his policy of non-compliance. "I suspect *that something will have to be done relatively soon," Senate* Majority leader Trent Lott said on NBC's *Meet the Press* last Sunday.

On the same televised programme, Senate Minority leader Tom Daschle said, "Obviously, there is bi-partisan support. The actions of Saddam Hussein are completely unacceptable, and I think we have to act sooner than later." Furthermore, Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich said, "*The United States* will take whatever steps are necessary to enforce an ability to inspect. This is a country that we know has had an ongoing effort to develop weapons of mass terror, and we can't tolerate it. We defeated them militarily. They need to abide by the rules, and we should be prepared to take whatever steps are necessary to enforce those rules."

Experts and observers on Iraqi affairs disagree about the possibility and the extent of a "surgical" military operation if Saddam continues his standoff. But they agree that the Iraqi *leader has once again miscalculated the situation.*

The response of the Gulf War coalition forces to Iraq's latest manoeuvre continues to puzzle many observers. There has been no official American response to Arab reaction re*jecting any further military strikes against Iraq.* The Cairo-based Arab League, as well as other Arab countries have expressed their opposition to US threats to use force against Baghdad.

It will also be worth paying attention to the coming discussions in the Security Council and the line China takes concerning the crisis. Generally, Beijing was opposed to sanc*tions and military intervention.* The Iraqi issue — as *The New York Times* mentioned — could be an early test of relations with Washington after the recent visit of president Jiang Zemin to the US.

Thus, only the coming days will provide an answer to whether the present crisis is just a "diplomatic standoff" or the pretext for a "military confrontation".

The Washington Post reported on Tuesday that the Pentagon spokesmen said there had been no new movements of US forces to the Gulf region. "Since bolstering the US naval presence there last month with the arrival of the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier, the United States has more than 200 aircraft in place and seven ships capable of firing Tomahawk cruise missiles into Iraq," *The Washington Post* reported.

Fixing the agenda

Arafat's reluctant decision to increase the size of the Palestinian delegation may have saved this week's Washington talks from instant derailment. But at what cost, writes **Graham Usher** from Jerusalem

On Sunday, Israel dispatched around a dozen negotiators to Washington headed by *Foreign Minister* David Levy. The Palestinians sent three — chief PLO negotiator Mahmoud Abbas and Palestinian Authority (PA) ministers Nabil Shaath and Saeb Erekat. The reason for the discrepancy in delegations was spelled out by the PA's Higher Education Minister Hanan Ashrawi, on Voice of Palestine radio on Monday.

"We do not see the meeting in Washington as a continuation of negotiations but as an attempt to get rid of the cause of the breakdown in the talks, particularly the questions of settlements and further redeployment," she said. To this end, say Palestinian sources, Arafat had given firm orders to his del*egates not to let the talks be side*tracked into any issue other than settlements and Israel's second West Bank redeployment, now two months overdue.

The Israelis, on the other hand, want the talks to focus not only on these questions but *also on the* so-called interim issues that have yet to be implemented from previous agreements, most notably the opening of a Palestinian airport, harbour and industrial park in Gaza and the establishment of a safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank.

The divergent agendas became apparent as soon as Abbas and Levy held their first tête-à-tête in Washington. Unable to wrest from Levy a commitment on *either the date and scope of* the next redeployment, Abbas reportedly walked out, pending further instructions from Arafat. But the instructions came from the Americans.

"The Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is concerned the Palestinian delegation was not in a position to discuss some of the interim issues related to the airport, the seaport and the industrial park," commented State Department spokesperson, James Rubin, in his daily briefing to the press on Monday. "We are trying to fix that".

It was swiftly fixed. Levy reportedly told the Palestinian delegates that if they tried to confine discussions to settlements and redeployment, he and his delegation would return to Israel. Much the same message was conveyed by Albright in a "private" meeting with Abbas on Monday evening. By nightfall, Palestinian negotiators for the various interim committees were en route to Washington.

Palestinian reticence *to discuss the interim* issues in Washington (rather than at home) stems from the suspicion that Israel will finesse an agreement this week on either the airport or the industrial park to mask a lack of progress on the core matters of settlements and redeployment. Despite claims to the contrary, Palestinians believe Levy has arrived in Washington with no mandate to negotiate either a settlement freeze or a further redeployment.



A Palestinian boy holds an over-sized mock assault rifle during an Islamic Jihad rally where a symbolic funeral for the ailing Middle East peace process was staged. Top Palestinian and Israeli negotiators resumed their talks *under US auspices in Washington yesterday* *(photo: Reuters)*

Following last week's cabinet meeting, Israel's minister for industry and trade, Nathan Sharansky, said that if the Palestinians insisted on a date for the next redeployment, the matter would have to be brought back to the Israeli government for approval. He also made it clear that the "depth of our redeployment" will be conditional on the PA "destroying the terrorist infrastructure" *in the self-rule areas,* which is another way of saying there will be no meaningful redeployment.

As for settlements, the most it appears *Levy has been mandat*ed to offer is a "slow-down" in construction in exchange for Palestinians agreeing to defer the further redeployments for the duration of "accelerated" final status negotiations. The PA has always rejected this trade-off in the past and must do so in Washington, says West Bank Fatah leader and Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) member for Ramallah, Marwan Barghouti. "It would be disastrous for Palestinians to accept this idea", he says. "Our interest is to negotiate the interim agreement and further redeployments and then — if Netanyahu is prepared to freeze all settlement activity and land confiscation — to go ahead with the final status talks".

Nor has Levy yet revealed what his government means by a "slow-down" in settlement building, though a clue was given by a lead article in Israel's *Ha'aretz* newspaper on Tuesday. Citing Israel's Ministry of Building and Construction housing programme for the next two years, the article says there are plans to sell off land at the Jebel Abu Ghneim, or Har Homa, Jewish settlement in occupied East Jerusalem to build 1,000 housing units in 1998 and a further 300 units in 1999. There are also plans to sell land in the West Bank and Gaza to enable the construction of 4,420 units in 1998 and a total of 7,135 by 1999. It is almost certain that Binyamin Netanyahu approves of this "slow-down" — he is Israel's Minister of Building and Construction.

Election daze in Jordan

Jordanians voted on Tuesday in parliamentary elections which have been boycotted by the influential Muslim Brotherhood and *other opposition parties,* **Lola Keilani** *reports from Amman*

Amid accusations of election fraud and heavy-handed security measures, Jordanians headed to the ballot boxes on Tuesday. While voter turn-out was low in Amman — demonstrating a high degree of voter apathy — turn-out in rural areas, where tribal affiliation is stronger, was significantly higher. The government's "security measures" which preceded Tuesday's elections included the closure of 12 weekly opposition newspapers and banning the entry into Jordan of 70 Arab and *international journalists.*

Despite the election boycott announced by eight opposition parties — including the largest opposition political force, the Muslim Brotherhood group and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front (IAF) — four of those groups reneged and ended up fielding their candidates in the election. Moreover, there were 31 independent Islamists running in the elections, some of whom are former members *of the Muslim Brotherhood.* Six prominent IAF members also ran as independents, defying the IAF boycott.

The National Reform Forces (NRGF?), a grass roots committee representing the political forces which decided to boycott the elections, stressed that the 13th parliament will in no way represent the people and will be "a mere puppet in the hands of the government."

The NRGF said that the new parliament will *end up being an appointed council receiving* its orders from a government appointed by King Hussein. This will make it difficult to separate between the three powers of government since the executive authority will impose its will on the legislature and judiciary. Thus, the NRGF claims, it is a forgone conclusion that accountability (within the legislative and judicial processes) will cease to exist.

Political observers stressed that the current election campaign was the strangest in the history of the Kingdom. They said that as a result of the announced boycott, it became difficult, in certain constituencies, to recognise one single candidate whose contribution to the country made him known at a national level. Observers were also critical of the election campaign slogans. These slogans "lacked political direction, and were more like elementary school composition exercises," one opposition figure said.

Jamil Nimri, a political observer, said that in previous elections, three major forces could be identified as constituting the backbone of the Hashemite monarchy: Prominent political activists with independent affiliations; Islamist activists with charismatic appeal, and: tribal figures with strong Bedouin support.

As a result of the announced boycott, Nimri said, the dominant political force, the IAF, absented itself from the elections. On top of this, he added, the one-person-one vote system forced a number of prominent political figures to refrain from running in the elections.

Another political analyst, Muna Shuqair, said that this year's election was a setback for democracy in Jordan. "Jordan, at the official level, is drifting far away from the real — popular level — Jordan." she said. In coming *to this conclusion, she drew attention to the* political context in which this year's elections have been held. She said that the country is currently in the midst of a political crisis due to cabinet's refusal to deal with the demands of the people. She also accused the political leadership of ignoring the need for open, democratic channels of communication between the people and the government. "Today's elections," she said, "are the burial ground of the 1989 [election] dream of freedom, democracy and respect for human rights [in Jordan]."

The government, however, has refuted opposition claims that a one-sided, weak and unrepresentative parliament will emerge from the elections. It pointed out that opposition parties will make up roughly 20 per cent of the next parliament. Mazen Arnouti, an official election spokesperson, said that amongst those standing for election, there were 32 Islamist and 17 opposition candidates. He also said that 60 of the independent candidates had affiliations with opposition parties.

King Hussein, who had earlier promised transparent elections, criticised opposition groups for attempting to undermine the credibility of the parliament that will result from the elections. "There are some people who are trying to marginalise the role of the coming parliament. This is *unacceptable to all.* The task entrusted to the coming parliament is huge as the deputies have to involve themselves in the process of decision making and in shaping the future of Jordan. This is a particularly difficult task in the light of the prevailing political circumstances," the king said in a recent speech.

The government announced that it had accepted a request from the European Union to *provide election observers* to oversee voting and counting procedures. However, it had rejected opposition demands that international election supervisors be *present to assure the* honesty and transparency of the different stages of the electoral process.

The government also disputed opposition claims that the 185,000 members of the security forces are planning to cast their votes in the election, despite laws forbidding them from participating in the process. The government announced that it will confine the security forces to their barracks for the three days of voting, guaranteeing compliance with these laws. Opposition parties are nevertheless suspicious, believing that armed forces votes will tip the balance in favour of pro-government candidates. They recalled cases during the 1993 elections when army officers were given direct instructions to vote clandestinely in certain areas for certain pro-government candidates.

Amid widespread accusations of election fraud, and *concrete evidence of irregularities* in pre-elections procedures, the government has agreed to publish voter lists. Prior to the elections, the government also promised to erase the names of the 120,000 deceased Jordanians whose names, up until recently, have appeared on these lists.

Opposition parties have also been critical following the Ministry of the Interior's refusal to expel 11 candidates caught printing voting cards *after collecting* unused cards from polling stations. Demands that these candidates be severely punished have so far gone unheeded, however *investigators* are currently looking into the case.

Another pro-government candidate was caught with 9,000 fraudulent voting cards, all of them carrying Interior Ministry stamps. However, Hani Hourani, director of the Al-Urdun Al-Jadid Research Centre said, "it is ridiculous to blame the government for the circulation of forged voter cards." "In an election based on tribal affiliations and provincial outlooks, *rather than on* a national strategy, this [the forgery of voting cards] is bound to happen," he conceded.



Peace process

OVER 1,500 supporters of the Islamic Jihad group held a rally on Monday in the West Bank town of Hebron, trampling on Israeli flags. A group of masked militants marched through the rally on the campus of Hebron University carrying a coffin marked: "The Peace Process," and sporting toy Kalashnikovs while a tape played the noise of machine gun-fire.

Banners on the walls of the courtyard read: "Our goal is to implement God's rule on earth, to free our lands and to wipe Israel out of existence."

The rally was the latest of a series organised by Jihad across the West Bank and Gaza over the past week to mark the second anniversary of the killing of Fathi Shikaki, a Jihad leader who was assassinated by Israeli intelligence agents in Malta on 26 October 1995.

The release of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel was the focal point of rallies elsewhere in the West Bank. Israel is currently holding about 5,000 Palestinian political prisoners, most of them detained without charge or trial.

Sudan talks open

PEACE talks between representatives of Sudan's Islamist government and southern Sudanese rebels continued in Nairobi, Kenya, this week with no signs of a breakthrough, news agencies reported.

The talks opened on Wednesday last week with Kenyan Foreign Minister Kalonzo Musyoka defining the major bone of contention as separation of state and religion, and self-determination for southern Sudan.

The Sudanese government delegation is headed by Foreign Minister Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, and that of the rebel the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) by its second-in-command, Salva Kiir.

In his opening statement at the talks, Sudanese Foreign Minister Taha said: "We have come to talk to our Sudanese brothers who have preferred, for a long time, to fight while we have preferred under all circumstances to bring them into the national ranks to end the war and cultivate peace."

In reply, SPLA's Kiir said: "Given the usual attitude of the government... the SPLA remains doubtful as to whether [Khartoum] will live up to its obligations and maintain its commitment [to peace talks]."

The civil war between Khartoum and the SPLA is estimated to have cost over a million lives in Africa's biggest country.

No nuclear deal

CHINA denied this week that it might have nuclear dealings with Iran, saying it has no intention of selling nuclear technology to the Islamic Republic.

Chinese President Jiang Zemin was on a visit to the United States last week. At the end of the visit, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Shen Guofang told a news conference that since China was not engaging in any nuclear cooperation with Iran, there was no need to provide assurances to the US on the issue.

"On proliferation of nuclear weapons and related technology we have always been very strict," Shen stressed. "We do not sell nuclear weapons to any country or transfer related technology. This is our long-standing position. This policy is targeted at all countries."

Last Friday, former Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani blasted the United States for pressing China on its ties with Iran. "America is raising its hostility against Iran to a global level and is now pressuring Russia, China and France (to break ties with Tehran)," he said during a Friday prayer sermon broadcast on Tehran radio.

Referring to the Sino-American summit in Washington last week, he said: "During a historic summit between the great powers China and America, Iran becomes the most sensitive issue because the American President [Bill Clinton] is trying to encourage his Chinese counterpart to halt all cooperation with Iran."

During the Sino-US summit, Clinton announced he would permit US nuclear exports to China after Beijing reportedly gave assurances it would end all new nuclear cooperation with Iran and quickly phase out two existing projects.

Prison comforts

TWO British nurses charged with the murder of an Australian colleague in Saudi Arabia were made more comfortable in their prison cells last week with the installation of new bathroom facilities and access to fast food.

Deborah Parry, 39, and Lucille Mclauchlan, 31, have been jailed in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, since their arrest last December. They were accused of killing an Australian colleague, Yvonne Gilford, at the King Fahd military medical complex where all three worked.

Last September, lawyers of the Gilford family said that Parry had been sentenced to death for the murder, in accordance with Saudi Arabia's strict Islamic laws.

Parry was spared execution, however, when the victim's brother, Frank Gilford, waived his right to seek the death penalty in exchange for financial compensation.

Now Parry and Mclauchlan are both facing a moderate jail sentence.

The two women, complaining they found life in the women's section of Dammam central prison difficult, received some improvement in their prison conditions.

British consul-general in Saudi Arabia William Patey told Reuters that new showers and toilets have been built, and that the prisoners have access to fast food from outside the prison.

The myth breakers

Hizbullah guerrillas in southern Lebanon are confident they are winning the war against the Israeli army, one of the best equipped and trained fighting forces in the world. Zeina Khodr reports from a secret guerrilla base in south Lebanon

Hizbullah resistance fighters camp out for days in the forest-capped mountains adjacent to the zone Israel occupies in southern Lebanon, patiently waiting for the best opportunity to launch their attacks against Israeli occupation soldiers and members of its allied militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA).

These fighters are young men who believe that resisting occupation is a sacred religious and national duty. "This is an obligation, it is our right. They are occupying our land, and we have to resist them," said 26-year-old Hatem who was dressed in a military fatigues and holding an M-16 rifle. Hatem, who only agreed to be identified by his first name, was among five fighters interviewed by *Al-Ahram Weekly* while hiding in the hills near the front-line. He said he was a university student. But like many other young Lebanese, he quit his studies in order to join the resistance.

"Sometimes we stay here for days or weeks before going back home. This really depends on the situation on the ground," he said. Hatem added that, like other guerrillas, he had to undergo intensive training before he was deployed on the battlefield. This training includes the use of live ammunition and weaponry seized from the Israeli occupation soldiers. "We are ready if they launch an attack. I am not afraid. In fact, I feel very happy when I engage in clashes with Israeli troops," Hatem said.

According to observers, Israel is losing the war in southern Lebanon and recent military setbacks have prompted the Israeli army to re-examine its methods in the area. "Hizbullah is getting stronger," Israeli Army Chief of Staff General Amnon Shahak said. "Part of the problem is that we have very little useful intelligence material about Hizbullah's activities," he added.

Hizbullah military officials doubt Israel will launch an all-out strike but do not rule out an escalation in Israeli attacks.

"A military advance will not pull the Israelis out of the mess they have dumped themselves in," Sheikh Nabil Kawook, Hizbullah's southern commander told the *Weekly*. "On the contrary, it will unleash an additional blow to the enemy and its morale. Recent experiences should discourage Israel from repeating the same mistakes. In every military sphere, the resistance is closely monitoring Israeli activities."

Meanwhile, Lebanese officials released statements this week to calm fears of an imminent Israeli strike that have swept the country following a reported warning from Russia's Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov. During his tour of the region which ended last week, Primakov reportedly obtained information that Israel was preparing for a wide-scale assault against the Hizbullah resistance movement.

Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri warned of "grave challenges" facing Lebanon because of the increasingly intractable Middle East peace process. But Hariri said he did not believe a major Israeli onslaught was imminent.

House Speaker Nabih Berri also sought to play down reports about an imminent Israeli attack. He said that "had there been real plans to launch a major offensive, they would never have been made public." Foreign Minister Fares Boueiz also updated the Lebanese cabinet after inquiring about the reported Russian warning and described the media reports as "inaccurate".

But for Hizbullah fighters, reports about an imminent Israeli attack is business as usual and are considered as yet another attempt by the occupation forces to find a way out of the quagmire. Observers of the military situation in southern Lebanon believe that although Hizbullah may not have Israel's sophisticated weaponry, its proficiency has grown and it has become a sophisticated fighting force.



Hizbullah members demonstrating in a recent rally in south Lebanon

"The resistance in the south exploits the enemy's weaknesses. We take all the necessary measures and we study our tactics well. The military command of the resistance makes a point of studying thoroughly Israel's tactics and its way of thinking," Kawook explained. "Israel is not stronger because of its weapons. Today it is weak. We are stronger and this is because of our beliefs. We hold on to our sacred and religious right to resist illegal occupation."

Over the past two months, Hizbullah has succeeded in destroying Israel's most sophisticated tank, known as the Merkava II. The Israeli daily *Maariv* said Hizbullah had obtained new anti-tank rockets capable of piercing the armour of Merkava II which contains extra thick armour plating made of special metal intended to reduce the effect of rocket attacks. Hizbullah's success in destroying Merkava II did not only deal a blow to Israel's military, but also threatened Tel Aviv's plans to sell this tank to Turkey, Israeli media reported.

"We studied the Merkava. We know its secrets. The resistance ended the myth of the Merkava, and reduced it to scrap metal. It is now an easy target," Kawook added. "No matter what weapons they use in the south, they will lose the battle," he said with confidence.

The Israeli-allied SLA militia are also suffering from low morale. Over the past year, more than 100 SLA fighters defected and many joined the ranks of the resistance. "Hizbullah has turned the Israeli-allied militia (led by Antoine Lahd) into nothing more than a burden for the Israelis. Israel's aim is to use this militia as a bunker and a form of defence. It wants the militia to do the killing instead of its soldiers," the southern commander said. "But the militia's presence is not helping Israel and there is now a growing mistrust between the two sides," he added.

Kawook also expected that more Lebanese, whether Muslim or Christian, and other Arab nationals would be willing to join the resistance against Israel. "There is a desire among youth to join the resistance. We met a lot of them and many are ready to carry out suicide attacks against Israelis. We welcome them with our arms open," he said.

Hizbullah's Secretary-General Sayed Hassan Nasrallah also announced recently that the party will soon announce a more lenient recruiting policy in order to give more Lebanese and Arabs the chance to join the resistance. "Any honest Lebanese who wishes to participate in the resistance is welcome," Nasrallah told his supporters in a recently-held rally in Beirut.

Algeria rejects world "interference"

The Algerian government and most opposition parties remain firm in rejecting any international mediation to help bring an end to the ongoing bloodshed in the country despite numerous pleas by human rights groups, writes Amira Howeidy

"Algeria is a sovereign state which gives it the right to reject, and condemn, any attempt to interfere in its internal affairs," declared Algerian President Liamine Zeroual in a speech last week marking the beginning of Algeria's resistance against former French occupation. Zeroual's comments were the first official, and by far, the strongest reaction to increasing calls for international mediation or independent investigation into the country's six-year-old crisis. "Only the Algerian nation and its institutions can be the legitimate actor and interlocutor," he said in his speech.

The speech came only a few days after the formation of new local government councils following the 23 October municipal elections. "Algeria's political crisis is over now," he asserted.

Algerian opposition political parties as well as Western human rights groups disagreed with Zeroual's assessment. They insisted that the election results, announced earlier last week, were rigged in favour of the pro-government National Democratic Rally (RND). Two mass rallies took place in the streets of Algiers last week protesting at "wide-spread fraud".

But Algeria's political parties confined their protest to claims of election fraud. The international community, on the other hand, remains worried about the escalating wave of violence and the daily massacres sweeping the country. The continued failure of the Algerian army to stop or resist the carnage has been questioned by many inside and outside Algeria.

"Why don't the security forces and the army step in to protect women, children and the elderly when the killings go on for hours within earshot of military barracks?" asked the London-based human rights group Amnesty International in a statement issued last week.

In an attempt to refute such reports, Algerian Armed Forces Chief Mohamed Lamari gave a rare interview to the Algerian army magazine *El-Djeich* this week in which he denied "rumours of dissension" among military leaders. Lamari, who has often been depicted as the leading advocate of ruthless measures to eradicate the Islamist rebels, complained of attempts by the press to categorise generals into those who advocate negotiation with the rebels and those who advocate more extreme measures. Algerian generals, he said, could not be divided into "negotiators, eradicators, Islamists and secularists."

Supporters of Algerian opposition parties during a recent demonstration protesting the results of municipal elections announced last week. Opposition groups alleged elections were rigged and marked with violations in order to assure a sweeping victory for pro-government candidates *(photo: Reuters)*

Responding to complaints that the army has failed to prevent the spate of massacres that has rocked Algeria in recent months, Lamari argued that the massacres had occurred because "the alert was not given in time, either through complicity... or through deception."

Human rights groups are unconvinced. Amnesty International said in its statement that the first step towards ending the infernal cycle of human rights violations was "to establish an independent and impartial inquiry to shed light on all these crimes and establish who is responsible for them. If the Algerian authorities have nothing to hide, they shouldn't oppose, but welcome any such initiative," the statement concluded.

Not only do the Algerian authorities oppose these arguments in principle, but they also dismiss any reference to the crisis that does not blame the violence on the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). More than 80,000 people have been killed since the army nullified the 1992 elections which the now outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was poised to win. The FIS military wing announced a unilateral cease-fire which went into effect on 1 October, but this did not lead to the cessation of violence.

According to Amnesty International, many of the disturbing questions which point to military involvement in the violence remained "unanswered and unexplained" by the Algerian authorities which "often hide behind the rhetoric of national sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. Curiously, these same authorities welcome the international community's condemnation of 'terrorism' with open arms."

Amnesty International and three other international human rights groups called upon the 53-member UN Commission on Human Rights last month, to hold a special session to examine the situation in Algeria.

The call for international mediation was initiated by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan a month ago and was followed by similar calls by Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF and UNHCR. Last week, Germany joined these groups and invited Algerian members of parliament to Bonn in "an effort to find ways to end the bloodshed." The invitation follows an offer of help by European Union ministers at a summit in Luxembourg two weeks ago.

"When there are serious violations of civil rights and when the situation is as bad as it is in Algeria, I do not, and cannot consider it to be an internal situation," Robinson said after a meeting with Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf at the UN General Assembly last month. She also pointed out that "the international community had to speak out about atrocities [in Algeria] even if that government objected."

The Robinson-Attaf talks went badly and ultimately triggered angry statements by various Algerian officials, including Attaf who said that his country needed no outside mediation despite the worsening violence.

But this did not stop Robinson who insisted on resuming dialogue with the Algerian government. Last week, she held a sudden meeting with Algeria's envoy to the UN in Geneva, Mohamed Saleh Dembri, amidst reports connecting Robinson with moves for a special session of the Commission on Human Rights. But the Commission's spokesman, John Mills, affirmed that she had not suggested holding a special session "as the matter is entirely within the competence of the 53 member states and the Commission itself."

Algeria's parties, on the other hand, remain worried about the recent local council election results and have also made public their rejection of calls for international mediation.

"International mediation never helped in solving anything. It amounts to intervention and is governed by the interests of the countries behind it," said Ahmed Dan, spokesman for the Islamist Movement for a Peaceful Society, MPS, (formerly Hamas) in a telephone interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly* from Algiers. "The problem in Algeria is a political one and can only be resolved politically and by Algerians themselves. International concern is highly appreciated, but remains exaggerated and unacceptable," he added. The establishment of an inquiry, he said, is useless. "We all know who is behind the killings, we don't need an international investigation to tell us," Dan said.

Morad Yasah, spokesman for the Workers Party, said that "the answer to Algeria's crisis is true democracy and fair elections contested by all. How can international mediation help in this?" he asked.

It remains to be seen whether the Algerians can be convinced of the benefits of international mediation. One thing is certain: violence continues in Algeria and there appears, for the foreseeable future, no solution to its problems.

Mandela's Libyan gesture

Despite Mandela's overtures of mediation between Britain, the US and Libya over the Lockerbie problem, the issue was not raised during the South African president's second visit to Libya. Khaled Dawoud reports from Tripoli

Since the United Nations imposed an air and arms embargo against Libya in 1992, visits by world leaders to the Arab North African country have been rare. Foreign officials who do venture to the country receive a warm welcome — their visits are considered an act of solidarity.

South African President Nelson Mandela, who visited Libya twice in one week, got overwhelmingly enthusiastic receptions on both occasions. Like elsewhere in the world, Libyans see Mandela as a living example of how people who remain committed to their cause win in the end, despite great suffering and sacrifices they might face in the course of their struggle.

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, though possessing a brand of revolutionism very different from Mandela's, has always considered the leader of the African National Congress a hero of the struggle for Third World liberation. Before Mandela's release from prison in 1990, after 27 years behind bars, the cause of the South African people and their struggle against apartheid was high on Gaddafi's revolutionary agenda. The Libyan leader used to grant an annual human rights award in Mandela's name and many ANC rebels found a safe haven in Tripoli. Such favours were acknowledged by Mandela during his recent visits to Libya, which he went ahead with despite strong US protests.

The UN clamped an air and arms embargo against Tripoli for refusing to hand over for trial in either the US or Britain two Libyans suspected of bombing an American airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, killing 270 people. Libya, supported by Arab and African countries, offered to try the two suspects in any third neutral country but the offer was rejected by both Western countries.

Mandela's two visits to Libya, one preceding his attendance of the Commonwealth Summit in Edinburgh, Scotland, and the second immediately after it, gave rise to speculation that the South African president was brokering a settlement of the Lockerbie issue.

According to news reports, Mandela did indeed raise the Libyan case in his meetings with British Prime Minister Tony Blair in Scotland, and also managed to gain the backing of most Commonwealth leaders for the Libyan proposal of a trial in a neutral country. But in his short speech before bestowing on Gaddafi the Order of Good Hope, the highest South African decoration awarded to a citizen of another country, Mandela made no mention of the Lockerbie issue. Instead, he delivered what many observers interpreted as criticism of Gaddafi and his revolutionary rhetoric.

"We have created a world body, the United Nations. That body is doing a magnificent job in promoting world peace and stability, and it calls upon all its members to settle their differences by peaceful means," Mandela said. "This means that leaders throughout the world, irrespective of their historic background and culture, must help that world body to spread the message of peace and stability. This means that leaders, however firm their position is, must be careful with their language, must be moderate, and their intention must be to bring leaders together to reduce tension, conflict and violence. I confer this [South Africa's] honour on my brother leader [Gaddafi] in the full knowledge and confidence that he and many other leaders in the world will hear my humble advice," Mandela added in the improvised speech to more than 2,000 Libyans who had gathered in the sports stadium of the city of Zwarah to watch the award ceremony.

Gaddafi did not miss the message and told Mandela that he accepted his advice. But the Libyan leader reminded Mandela and his audience of how the UN had turned into "a tool serving US interests alone". He added that the real power at the UN should be in the hands of the General Assembly, where all world nations are represented, and not in the hands of the Security Council, where the US holds the veto power. "The Security Council is America. Thus, the resolutions taken against Libya, Iraq or Somalia are not UN resolutions, but US resolutions."

Pictures of Mandela and South Africa's flag adorned nearly all walls in Zwarah, the closest Libyan town to the country's borders with Tunisia. Other banners in the streets attacked the United States and vowed that the Libyan people would never surrender to imperialism. "All peoples of the world say no to America, the people's blood sucker," said one banner. "Intimidation will not scare us," said another.

In a press conference which Gaddafi held after his short meeting with Mandela, he avoided any direct response to questions on whether Mandela's meetings in Britain had led to any progress in solving Libya's dispute with the US and Britain.

He said that the Commonwealth meeting proved that Britain was standing alone in insisting on maintaining sanctions against Tripoli. He added that nearly all 50 members of the Commonwealth, mostly Third World countries previously colonised by Britain, supported Libya's stand and its desire to solve the dispute peacefully. "Britain was isolated at the Commonwealth meeting, and its stand was condemned by all participants," he said.

He added that what Mandela was doing "is not mediation as much as it is an expression of Mandela's conviction of the justice of the Libyan stand and the soundness of its proposal to hold the trial of our sons in a third neutral country."

Reworking Somalia

Adversaries in the fierce fight for Somalia's future meet to make peace in Cairo, writes Gamal Nkrumah

"We are in Cairo because we believe in the Somali reconciliation process," Hussein Farah Aidid told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Aidid, the self-styled president of Somalia, who already controls much of the Somali countryside, now wants to fast-track his authority to extend to the rest of the country. His adversaries claim Aidid is attempting to unite Somalia by force — "Bismark style". Aidid claims he is acting in the name of peace.

The commander of the largest and best-equippped militia in Somalia, Aidid stressed that he wants to see Somalia take its rightful position as an active member of both the Arab League and the Organisation of African Unity. He told the *Weekly* that, "the only way Somalia can play these twin roles to the full is to overcome national disintegration and secure national reconciliation."

Somalia disintegrated into numerous clan-led fiefdoms following the ouster of the late Somali strongman Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991. In an attempt to curb the resulting violence, the United Nations imposed an arms embargo against the country. However, this only served to intensify factional warring. Hussein Farah Aidid emerged from this violence with the most support and is today the self-proclaimed President of Somalia. He controls the southern part of the Somali capital, Mogadishu, with his main rival, Ali Mahdi Mohamed, controlling the north.

While it is clear that Aidid has plenty of weapons and growing political clout, his detractors claim that he may still be a number of years away from assuming full control of war-torn Somalia. Mohamed has forces that come close to matching Aidid's. With a large cache of weapons and significant support, Aidid's main rival, Mohamed, remains an obstacle to Aidid's plans for national reunification.

Furthermore, Ethiopia, a key regional player and one of Mohamed's main backers, has strong reservations about Aidid's leadership. This is partly due to his father's close association with the former Ethiopian regime of Marxist military ruler, Mengistu Haile Mariam. Aidid's suspected links to Ethiopian Islamists and Somali secessionists — which Aidid is at pains to deny — are a further obstacle in the way of closer ties with Ethiopia. Aidid's support for Khartoum, which Ethiopia views with suspicion, is yet another complicating factor.

Mohamed's is not the only force posing a challenge to Aidid's leadership of Somalia. Other Somali groups are regrouping in order to halt Aidid's drive to reunite Somalia by force. A former Somali foreign minister, who asked not to be named, told the *Weekly* that Aidid had yet to prove his effectiveness. "The tribes treated Aidid's father [Mohamed Farah] with guarded respect and he returned the compliment as any elder tribal leader effortlessly does," he said.

Another close Mohamed associate bitterly explained how Aidid's clansmen, the Habr-Gedir — who hail from an arid area in central Somalia — forced their way into the agriculturally rich region between the Juba and Shebelle rivers. "[Mohamed Farah] Aidid was armed to the teeth," one of Mohamed's associates told the *Weekly*. "Armed with Russian weapons, Aidid and his Habr-Gedir clansmen swept down to the coastal areas, including the capital, and took over the richest agricultural and pastoral land in the country," he said. "In due course they controlled much of the capital," he added. "Moreover, Habr-Gadir landowners confiscated vast banana and oil palm plantations from the original inhabitants of area — the Digil and Marafla tribesmen. It was a wicked plan to rob the peasants of their land," he told the *Weekly*.

He later conceded that Hussein Farah Aidid's challenge differs somewhat from his father's. Aidid junior had come to understand how to prevent America from lashing out against his father's diehard and hotheaded supporters. Aidid the son was after all a US marine. America too, has come to understand that if it demonises Aidid, or any other Somali warlord, the Somalis will respond in kind.

Despite gradual progress in the process of reconciliation in Somalia, the country's leaders remain at loggerheads. Deeply entrenched resentment and mistrust remain. In separate interviews with the *Weekly*, neither Aidid nor Mohamed gave any specific details as to how they are planning to resolve what amount to fundamental differences of opinion. "Aidid's so-called government is not one of national unity. It is bogus and pretentious," a Mohamed aide said. And so it remains to be seen whether or not Aidid will be able to follow in the footsteps of his late father and take the reigns of this war-torn nation.

Many foreign observers however, say that Aidid's advisers are slicker and better qualified than those of his father. His father surrounded himself with sycophants, they say, while Aidid junior, well-aware of the importance of loyalty in a country such as Somalia, has a number of talented and effective aides and deputies at his side. One such person is the former diplomat, Abdul-Rahman Ali Ahmed Tur. Tur was the first president of Somaliland, but subsequently lost the presidential elections to the current President Mohamed Ibrahim Ogal of the breakaway northern third of the country which unilaterally declared itself Somaliland. Following his defeat, Tur fled Somaliland and joined Aidid. He is now the first vice-president in Aidid's government.

Also included in Aidid's advisory team are Habr-Gedir clan elders Mohamed Farah Jumale and Jama Mohamed Ghalib. Ghalib is a former minister of the interior, and is now Aidid's minister of foreign affairs. Real decision-making in Aidid's government however, is carried out by a 25-man strong committee of Habr-Gadir clan elders. "They are the kingmakers and real decision-makers," a Mohamed aide said.

Hussein Farah Aidid's rise to power in Somalia followed the death of his father. Hussein inherited the chairmanship of the United Somali Congress-Somali National Alliance (USC-SNA), a political party dominated by members of the Habr-Gedir clan of the Hawiye tribe — the largest of the six major tribal groupings in Somalia. He was unanimously declared leader by the USC-SNA.

At the helm of this disparate alliance, the former US marine has achieved more than sceptics had initially thought possible. Supporters of Aidid say that since assuming power, he has taken up where his father left off. Mohamed Farah Aidid's iron will was instrumental in the ousting of Siad Barre, and in expelling the US-led UN contingent from Somalia. He succeeded in evading capture following the posting by the US of a $25,000 reward. He was later killed, however, in tribal warring two years after declaring himself president of Somalia. Hussein Farah Aidid was then thrown into the deep end of Somali tribal politics.

Despite tentative steps towards reconciliation in Somalia, fighting continues in areas such as Baidowa, Lower Juba and Merca. The ethnic Digil and Marafle, who were routed by the forces of Mohamed Aidid and who subsequently had their land confiscated, have since regrouped and now form the Rahwenye Resistance Army (RRA). The RRA is the armed wing of the Somali Democratic Movement (SDM). Domestic and foreign investment has all by dried up for fear that wide-spread fighting may break out at any time. Only the most intrepid investors venture into Somalia.

The struggle for normality in a country that has long-since forgotten the meaning of the word, has most recently been spearheaded by Somali women. In the port town of Merca, a broad-based women's group led by Halima Arush has set up a small boarding school for young clan militiamen who agree to give up their weapons. In return they receive shelter, food and their first chance at an education. The project is financed by the European Union and an Italian humanitarian agency. "Women have played a leading role in our struggle. They are very much involved in all sectors [of restructuring]," Aidid told the *Weekly*. Outside of the struggle, many women hold high positions in Somali society, including the government. Amongst them are Ambara Hagi, Aidid's minister for women, development and family affairs, and Hawa Yeri, an official in charge of the Juba Valley region — Somalia's most populous and productive region.

Relative peace now reigns in Somalia — in Mogadishu at any rate. The idea of reconciliation is no longer regarded as unworkable. But Somali leaders in Cairo have to work hard at ensuring the current precarious peace holds. Will Aidid's rivals accept him as president? Will he, in return, give them ministerial posts in a government of national unity?

This is Aidid's third visit to Cairo this year. Aidid met Foreign Minister Amr Moussa last Tuesday for talks on the reconciliation conference scheduled for next month. This conference will bring Aidid and Ali Mahdi Mohamed together for talks on the future of the reconciliation process. The conference is being organised by the NSC. Explaining Egypt's role in the process, Medhat El-Qadi, the head of East African Affairs at the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, said, "We are speaking to the various Somali leaders, but [ultimately] Somalis have to resolve their own problems themselves."

Japan and Russia break the ice

Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto met in the Russian Far East to iron out differences, writes Abdel-Malek Khalil from Moscow

photo: Reuters

Dressed informally in furs and anoraks to beat the biting Siberian gales, Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto met in a Siberian woodland retreat near the town of Krasnoyarsk. The two leaders donned their hunting outfits for a sight-seeing tour of the former Soviet retreat of Sosna. It is rumoured that they had a fearsome brush with the elusive Siberian tiger. Having survived the endangered beast, they went fishing on the mighty Yenisei River. But wild beasts and wintry weather aside, the main point of the Siberian summit was to find out whether Russia, the vast and desolate Russian Far East, and forbidding Siberia have any chance of metamorphosing into tigers with a little help from Japan.

The summit began with an embarrassing faux pas: as Yeltsin stepped out into the birch and fir tree grounds of the Siberian retreat to meet Hashimoto, the Japanese prime minister stepped back and, in typical Japanese style, quickly snapped a photo of the Russian president. The unsuspecting Yeltsin mistook Hashimoto for just another Japanese photographer. The Russian president's aides rushed to the rescue and pointed out that the four foot five photographer was actually the Japanese prime minister. A red-faced Yeltsin then apologised profusely and gave the diminutive Japanese premier a traditional Russian bear hug. The gesture seemed to break the ice.

Yeltsin and Hashimoto exchanged gifts — two identical Japanese-made cameras. The Russian president, however, received another gift from the Japanese prime minister — an animation film with the truly apt title "Uneasy Friendship".

The touchy subject of the disputed Kuril Islands in the Pacific Ocean was not even raised, let alone discussed. The summit symbolically took place in the heart of the Siberian wilderness — exactly half way between Moscow and Tokyo — and as far away as possible from the Kurils and Russia's Pacific region. After the defeat of the Russians at the hands of the Japanese during the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, Japan's imperial designs on Russia's Far East increased dramatically. Russia, then the first European power to be routed by an Asian nation, never quite forgot the national humiliation inflicted on it. The Japanese never forgave the Russians for seizing the four tiny Kuril Islands soon after the end of World War II. The Russian occupation of the islands have been a constant source of tension between the two nations ever since. Japan is determined to regain control and threatens to slow down aid and trade opportunities if the Russians do not give up the islands. But the Russian inhabitants of the islands — mostly hunters and fur trappers — refuse to accept Japan's territorial claims. The Japanese dubbed the summit the "Hashimoto-Yeltsin Plan of Action." The Russians referred to it as the "Yeltsin-Hashimoto Plan of Action." But semantics aside, the two leaders got down to business. A joint fishing agreement was signed and other large-scale projects were discussed, including the development of a trans-Siberian railway, the construction of a pipeline from a Siberian natural gas field to China and Korea, and plans to revamp Russia's struggling banking and financial institutions.

Incidentally, only one big fish was caught by Hashimoto at the fishing expedition. Yeltsin failed to catch any fish, but he was not grumbling, he had set his eyes on an even bigger fish: joint Japanese-Russian work on the construction of a new generation of Russian nuclear reactors and the development of Sakhalin oil and gas fields off Russia's Pacific provinces. Oil installations in Sakhalin I and Sakhalin II are already under way with the help of Japanese technical and financial involvement. The large Pacific Ocean island Sakhalin was at one time a Japanese colony. The sparsely populated island, with a land mass roughly the size of Sweden's, is rich in energy resources and minerals.

Braving the incessant rain, eerie fog and the omnipresent snow of the Siberian tundra, the two leaders also discussed setting up a telephone hotline between Hashimoto and Yeltsin. Yeltsin was invited to pay a return visit to Japan next spring. The Russians were ecstatic after the Japanese, for the first time ever, voiced support for Russian membership of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum which groups the United States, Canada, Japan, China and several Asian and South American Pacific rim countries. It appears that the ice has finally been broken between Russia and Japan.

The poverty of aid

The ambiguous attitude of industrially advanced countries to development aid is worsening the problem of under-development. NGOs are now calling for a more regulated and equitable globalisation, writes Jooneed Khan from Montreal

"Does development cooperation still have meaning in an era of globalisation?" The question is raised by Sabina Siniscalchi, chair of Eurostep, at the beginning of the introduction to a 300-page study entitled "The Reality of Aid, 1997-1998" commissioned by a consortium of major NGOs from the industrially advanced countries and made public last month.

One could further ask whether the word "aid" itself means anything anymore? And, what does "Reality" mean when numerous and well researched studies refer to the "myth" of aid and even the "business" of aid?

"The word aid is in the title, but the expression most used throughout the report is development cooperation," points out Brian Tomlinson, director of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC), and a co-author of the study.

Indeed, the report paints an unusually frank picture of "The Reality of Aid". The rich "donor" countries now devote only one-quarter of one per cent of their GNP to the fight against poverty in the developing countries — the lowest level since statistics began in 1950.

Since the Earth summit of 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, when the industrially advanced countries reaffirmed their commitment to the UN development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of GNP, aid has fallen by 17 per cent in real terms.

This sharp fall has occurred even though "peace dividends" related to the end of the Cold War totalled nearly US$500 billion in military spending cuts between 1987 and 1995.

At the same time, private capital flow to developing countries, which was lower than public assistance five years ago, is now four times higher than the latter — $234 billion against $55 billion.

The total debt of developing countries, meanwhile, went from $1,132 billion in 1986 to $2,177 in 1996 a 92 per cent increase — so much so that 30 of the 48 countries of sub-Saharan Africa were forced to contract new loans to service their debt, and the debt of 20 countries to international institutions exceeds total exports.

Furthermore, market globalisation heightens unequal trade. "The evidence shows that the global market process undermines the lives and security of wide sectors of the population," writes Siniscalchi. The report notes that "4.3 billion people survive on $2 a day, while 20 per cent of the world's population lives on 85 per cent of the planet's total GNP".

"The efforts of developing countries to increase exports have been undermined by unfair trade rules and practices of Northern governments", writes Mark Curtis, of Actionaid. He cites the EU, which gives financial support to Third World countries trying to achieve food security but which, through its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), artificially reduces world market prices through direct subsidies to farmers and food dumping.

Such stark data, compiled jointly by Eurostep, US Actionaid, and ICVA (the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, of which the CCIC is a member), in collaboration with UNDP and OECD, among others, lead the authors of the report to condemn the "inconsistency" of "donor" countries.

"Governments must show leadership in ensuring coherent development strategies: policies in one area should not undermine those in another. All areas of government policy, not just aid, should promote sustainable development and human rights," writes Curtis in what constitutes the strongest recommendation of the report.

"International trade, investment, conflict prevention and debt relief are far more important in terms of creating opportunities for equivalent human development in an era of globlisation" he says, adding, "Arms exports, environmental policy and foreign policy are also critical factors. For aid to promote poverty reduction and human rights, it needs to be seen as part of a mix of policies that ensures a coherent overall development strategy."

Switzerland provides the study with two telling cases of "inconsistency". Swiss-made fighter aircraft have been used by the Burmese authorities against refugee camps within Burma who depend heavily on Swiss aid programmes. Furthermore, for every franc of Swiss aid donated, between SFr 0.90 and 1.02 is spent in Switzerland by the recipient nation. This dispels the notion that aid should be untied.

Other examples abound from the US, UK, France, Germany, Japan, Canada, and Australia. One reason for the inconsistency is the lack of transparency. The report calls on governments and multilateral institutions to "vastly improve their disclosure of information so that development strategies, progresses and financing agreements are in the public domain."

In another section of the report, Tomlinson praises Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy for his "progressive and distinct foreign policy." However, Tomlinson notes that Canada's overseas development assistance (ODA) will fall to 0.27 per cent of GNP next year, an all-time low.

"The report may sometimes seem soft but one should read carefully the parts about the inconsistency of donor countries backed up by examples," he said in an interview. In the report he does make the point that "the positive qualities of high profile initiatives are contradicted by the continued strong promotion of trade and investment links with countries whose governments are widely condemned for human rights violations."

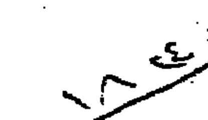
The CCIC last week presented the report before the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee and found the MPs were very receptive and "very interested in making Canadian ODA more effective." The report called for more comprehensive briefing sessions with officials of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Foreign Affairs, Defense and Environment departments, who each have their pet projects to defend.

"The government is now dipping into the declining ODA budget to finance programs that have nothing to do with the essential objective of fighting poverty in poor countries. Instead, projects like Radio-Canada-International, settling refugees in Canada, and peace-keeping and reconstruction by the armed forces in "Bosnia" are being instigated Tomlinson complained.

The study very briefly mentions states that have collapsed, particularly in the Great Lakes region of Africa "without relating this huge catastrophe to inconsistencies in the development policies of industrially advanced nations. But it points out that managers of aid programmes have come to see the state as a hindrance to development rather than a "help", adding that in the North, even parties of the Left have increasingly espoused reductions in the role of the state and welfare spending.

Ominously, the report warns that the Multilateral Agreement on Investment currently being negotiated by the WTO and OECD will further erode state authority in the South by depriving poor countries of their right to protect national small and medium businesses.

"We dream of a globalised world, where resources are equally distributed, and education, health, jobs, shelter, human rights and freedom are guaranteed to all," Tomlinson said. Development cooperation has its part to play in achieving this.



Charting the future in Kuala Lumpur

OF THE GROUP OF 15
3RD NOVEMBER 1997
KUALA LUMPUR

The world's leading developing countries attempted to assert their weight on the international arena at this week's G-15 summit. **Nevine Khalil** reports from Kuala Lumpur

Leaders of the G-15 countries at the opening of the Kuala Lumpur summit meeting *(photo: Reuters)*

The timing of this week's seventh G-15 summit, held in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, added further significance to a gathering which now brings together 16 of the developing world's most promising economies. Recent currency crises dominated summit deliberations, with member states formalising their position in a joint statement issued on the *first day of proceedings.*

Asian markets were hit hard by the currency crisis, with Malaysia and Indonesia, both G-15 members, among those hardest hit. During the summit, the Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad expressed condemnation of such market practices which, he said, threaten to permanently stunt the growth of his country's dynamic economy. The joint statement issued by the 16 members — namely Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Senegal, Veneznela and Zimbabwe — expressed agreement with Mohamad's views. It also expressed concern that similar future activities would stifle collective aspirations for economic development and prosperity of Third World countries.

A final communiqué issued at the summit noted *that the growth prospects of the developing world* "will largely depend on their ability to participate positively in the emerging global economic system". In the communiqué, participants committed themselves to the process of globalisation, a process "which leads to a more equitable and sustainable pattern of development and rapid growth... reciprocated by a supportive, fair and non-discriminating international economic environment". The communiqué also called for greater access to the markets, capital and technology of the developed world "to further facilitate our already significant contribution to the global economy."

G-15 members urged the developed world to "speedily and fully" implement their Uruguay Round commitments, especially those calling for the provision of "special and differential treatment towards developing countries." While welcoming *direct foreign investment in their economies and* supporting measures to facilitate such flows, member states reaffirmed the need to supplement "market-based strategies for development with social and economic considerations." Participants also endorsed greater private sector involvement in the G-15's economic activities. However they expressed disappointment that, five years after committing themselves to sustainable development efforts at the UN Conference on Environment and Development, conditions in developing countries had deteriorated.

The summit's statement on currency volatility noted that "the stability of the financial system in several countries, including members of the G-15, has come under serious pressure arising out of speculative activities against their currencies." It noted that these manipulative practices had spread to equity markets throughout the world, which "amply *demonstrated that no one country can be* insulated from the consequences of turbulence in the financial market." Participants emphasised the need for an international effort to manage such crises in the future, calling upon the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to regulate developments in currency markets "in order to make them more open and transparent."

Delegates at a closed heads of delegation session — held on the first day of the summit — discussed suggestions that serious consideration be given to requests by other countries to join the body. Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said that requests from West Asian countries would be given special consideration not only on the basis of geographical location but also economic conditions and commitment to G-15 principles. Countries which have so far officially *shown interest in joining the G-15 include* Jordan, Kuwait and Vietnam.

This year's Malaysian summit was attended by six heads of state — namely Mubarak, Indonesia's Suharto, Peru's Alberto Fujimori, Algeria's Lamine Zeroual, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe and Malaysia's Mohamed. Others were represented by vice-presidents or ministers. The group's name is being maintained despite Kenya's admission, which brings the number of members to 16.

Marching for justice

Braving wintry weather conditions, hundreds of thousands of women of colour gathering in Philadelphia took a strong stand against years of oppression and social marginalisation. African American women vow to fight back, writes **Faiza Rady**

A damp and rainy fall day in Philadelphia, 25 October, witnessed one of the largest women's marches in US history. "As far as the eye could see, Benjamin Parkway was a sea of humanity as women of African descent, from all over the country and around the world, gathered in Philadelphia for the Million Woman March," wrote sociologist Monica Moorehead in the American weekly, *Workers' World*. "This is very moving. I went to the civil rights march with Martin Luther King, but then the African American women's *movement* was just a drop in the ocean. Here, there are so many young women. I feel so good. I'm singing and I can't even sing," said 75-year-old Earthleane Greene, who had come all the way from Ann Arbor, Michigan. "I've been to many marches in Philadelphia, but I've never experienced anything that impressive," Betsy Piette, a community activist, told *Al-Ahram Weekly.*

Although the event was held on behalf of African American women, thousands of African American men joined in solidarity. Sad James Wood, from Marlton, New Jersey: "I wanted to bring my five-year-old daughter Dominique down to show her what togetherness is all about. I wanted to share a bit of history with her. A father and daughter getting to share something like this, it doesn't get any better." African American men who stayed home were enjoined by the organisers to support the women marchers by "providing them with a positive environment to return to by taking care of *their* children and cleaning the house."

Organisers estimated that 1.5 million women marched, while the police only claimed 500,000. The action was modeled on the Million Man March of 1995, when hundreds of thousands of African American men demonstrated in Washington DC. against racism and the *social* and political assaults waged against the black community.

Unlike the Million Man March, which was sponsored by Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan and benefited from a high-profile media coverage and considerable financial backing from the powerful Nation of Islam, the Philadelphia women's march was strictly *grass* roots. Sponsored by two virtually unknown local activists — Phile Chionesu, owner of an African artifacts shop, and Asia Coney, a public housing activist — calls for the march started out with two phone lines and no fax machine a year ago. "Grass roots is the real, practical way of getting things done," *Chi*onesu said. "We not only talked about it, but we practised it and we demonstrated that it works."

Largely ignored by the mainstream media, the organisers were forced to rely on alternate channels of communication. Tabyah Ngozi, media coordinator for the march, said that she had tried early in the year to hold news conferences — without much success. "When we didn't get the response that we wanted from the mainstream media, we just kept within the tradition of the underground railroad," said Ngozi, referring to the slaves' liberation struggle during which information *could only be transmitted* by word of mouth. "You just pass information on to one person, they pass it to another. It just keeps getting passed on," she explained. The women who came to Philadelphia said that they had heard about the march by word of mouth, through Internet sites and the nation's black-owned and black-oriented media.

In her opening address to the crowd, organiser Phile Chionesu called the march "a declaration of independence from ignorance, poverty, enslavement and all the things that have happened to us that has helped to bring about the confusion and disharmony that we experience with one another." Chionesu outlined a 12-point platform aimed at: establishing independent black schools, promoting self-help programmes for women ex-prisoners and drug addicts, ending homelessness, and pressuring the government to stop alleged CIA drug-pushing, which, she said, is destroying the social fabric of black communities.

While this last demand specifically addresses the US government, the others seek to effect solutions from within and target the black community. "As with the Million Man March, there was a conspicuous absence of demands targeting the US government — or the big business class it represents — to correct the multitude of social problems faced by the community," commented Moorehead. Some analysts believe that the trend to establish a consciously independent and separate African American movement stems from a total and bitter disillusion with the neo-liberal capitalist state.

"How can we expect help from this government when Clinton has slashed welfare allocations — including food stamps — to single mothers and their children," march coordinator, Khalida Abdul-Wali, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Look at what they have done with our education system," she added. "The government has cut federal money allocated to education and now most school funding depends on tax money. Since our communities are poor, we get very little money for education — most of our youths therefore graduate as functional illiterates, find no jobs and turn to drugs and violence. This is destroying the social fabric of our lives," explained Abdul-Wali.

In fact, funding for a Gender Educational Equity Programme, which aims to eliminate gender bias and encourage girls to enter science and math programmes, was recently halved to $2 million. Translated, this figure amounts to a 5 cent expenditure for every American girl, compared to the $3,072 annual pay raise Congress recently granted itself, and the *$646,000,000* per day the House allocated to the military.

Time and again speakers at the march said that poverty and class inequality degrade the lives of millions of African American women. Federal statistics show that 53 per cent of black families are headed by single women, 45 per cent of which are living in poverty. Moreover, African American women rank behind white and black men and white women in higher education — with only 12.9 per cent obtaining a college degree.

As a result, African American women are nearly three times as likely to live in poverty and twice as likely to be out of work than white women. In 1966, black women who worked full time earned 88 per cent of the wages of similarly employed black men, 85 per cent of comparably employed white women, and 62 per cent of white men's income.

Denouncing the extreme social inequality that hit African American women and children, prominent African American politician and civil rights activist Jesse Jackson recently decried that "one tenth of all American children go to bed in poverty and half of all America's African American children grow up amidst broken sidewalks, broken hearts, broken cities and broken dreams." In reference to the class gap, a 1993 Census Bureau study concluded that "the ranks of poor Americans *swelled* by 1.2 million to 37 million last year, while the wallets of the richest got fatter."

By the late 1980s, hunger in the world's richest and most powerful nation had increased by 50 per cent, affecting some 30 million people. Between 1973 and 1992 poverty levels grew by 47 per cent, leaving 20 per *cent hungry. Like African* children in the refugee camps of Rwanda and Zaire, 14 million American children continue to go hungry.

"The American economy, the American society, and the American unconscious are all racist," commented writer Michael Harrington in *The Other America*, explaining that "the laws against colour may have been removed, but that leaves the poverty that is the historic and institutionalised consequence of colour. As long as this is the case, being born African American is the most profound disability that the United States imposes upon a citizen." A disability the 1.5 million African American women, gathered in *Philadelphia*, vowed to combat.

Taking America by surprise

Julia Wright, an African American author and activist who was among the speakers addressing the Million Woman March in Philadelphia, comments on the significance of the event

The media said they were "taken unawares." Philadelphia city and government officials were stunned. On 25 October, the Million Woman March brought nearly two million women of African, Hispanic and Asian descent to central Philadelphia. Seemingly everything had conspired against such numbers: not only the cold and the rain but the lack of cooperation of Philadelphia city hall which insisted on charging a "special event rate" of $10,000 although the organisers were bringing in hundreds of thousands of consumers, an unhoped for boost for the state tourist industry. In the same hostile and begrudging spirit, minimal parking space was allotted to hundreds of buses, far outside the city, causing exhausted marchers to start their long ride home at dawn.

Another original feature which appears to have been a key ingredient of its success: the march — unlike Farrakhan's Washington march two years before — was not dominated by one single organisation. The women's march not only did not exclude the men (as had been the case at Farrakhan's march, which excluded women) but constituted a sprawling united front of groups and committees across the political spectrum from the grassroots of inner America all the way up to Congress — Maxine Waters, who heads the congressional black caucus was a keynote speaker — and all the way out to Africa in the person of one of the march's international speakers, Winnie Mandela.

But the emphasis was grass roots and the resulting momentum was what took the-powers-that-be unawares.

The march's 10-point programme includes mobilising against human rights violations in America and several of the speakers — women and men — spoke forcefully of the ordeal of Pennsylvania's best known political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, who has been on the state's death row for 16 years following a blatantly biased trial.

In fact, the most potent and far-reaching feature of the march is that its founder and national co-organiser, Phile Chionesu, is a long-standing friend and supporter of Mumia Abu-Jamal, who is the godfather of her children. Through its chief organiser, the Million Woman March is thus sending a clear message to the biased courts of justice which are sending more and more sons, husbands and fathers to prison and to execution in Pennsylvania.

In fact, Phile Chionesu cannot afford even a moment's rest: she is busy preparing herself to become co-prosecutor for the international people's tribunal for Mumia Abu-Jamal on 6 December in the city of Philadelphia.

In her stride

While all-party talks continue in closed session in Northern Ireland, last Thursday saw Belfast professor Mary McAleese elected as the Republic of Ireland's eighth president. But will her role in the peace process be more than academic? **Peter Snowdon** examines her scope for action

"I want us to share as a nation the adventure of this, the most dynamic country in Europe heading into the new millenium. And I believe that millenium will see the Irish people take a central role as key players, not just on the European stage where we are already key players, but globally. It will mark, I believe, the true age of the Irish because I believe we are an unstoppable nation, now very definitely in our stride."

Farewell then, pints of *Guinness to whose depth there is no end*, the plangent note of the uillean pipes, and a millenially-conflicted renegade, romantic culture grounded in the kind of Christian heritage Julian the Apostate would have died for. Farewell too, subsidies for fictive sheep, deserted townlands lapped by crumbling walls, all-day radio phone-ins on the medical requirements for emigration to Australia. On Thursday 30 October, Mary McAleese, pro-vice-chancellor of Belfast's Queen's University, was elected president of the Republic of Ireland.

Any sense of the grandiose in her victory speech might be excused, given the occasion. After all, her predecessor, Mary Robinson, was recently appointed UN Commissioner for Human Rights. If Ireland has a mission in *the 21st century, doubtless it will be accomplished not in some Connemara* monastery, snug or stable, with the rain beating down outside, but in an air-conditioned board room high above New York, Geneva or Brussels.

The presidency is a largely ceremonial post, but Robinson showed how powerful a hold it could have over the Irish imagination. She seemed to be held responsible for having transformed the country, almost single-handedly, from a corrupt gerontocracry, an "Albania of the mind", into a modern, liberal and liberated European nation. For symbolising so aptly their aspirations, the Irish people took her to their hearts in an act of collective affection unprecedented since independence.

The demographic imbalance produced by decades of economic out-migration is no longer a fatal weakness, but a rising strength. Ten years ago the Republic was seen — and often saw itself — as a deserted backwater surviving only on remittances from richer cousins abroad, held fast in the clammy grip of social repression. Now it is the youngest country in Europe — half the population is under 26 — and, according to some analysts, the only one likely to meet the Maastricht conversion criteria without resort to creative accounting. Whether James Joyce would now choose a stylish warehouse job in the "party capital of Europe" over exile in a Parisian attic remains a moot question. But the change, nonetheless, is palpable.

McAleese is part of that change, but her victory, though decisive, is far from straightforward to interpret. Coming from behind to beat the early favourite anti-nuclear campaigner Ade Roche into fourth place, she polled 58.7 per cent, the *highest score* ever in an Irish presidential election, beating the previous record set by the father of the Republic, Eamonn De Valera, in 1959. But she did so on the lowest ever recorded turnout: only 47.4 per cent of the population took the trouble to vote.

She is only the second woman to hold the post, and the first UK citizen. Raised in a Protestant district of working-class Belfast, until her family were driven out by sectarian attacks, she has remained a devout Catholic, morally conservative, but far from subservient to authority. She supported the hierarchy's call for a no-vote in the Republic's divorce referendum (the 'yeses' won by the narrowest of margins), and is known to be opposed to abortion. But she also describes herself as a feminist, and is a vocal proponent of women's right to be ordained as priests. Politically, she is a nationalist, but despite Gerry Adams' ringing endorsement of her candidacy and a smear campaign portraying her as a Sinn Fein "sympathiser" (neither of which seem to have done her much harm), her credentials as an opponent of all forms of republican violence are above question. As she said in her acceptance speech, "the situtation in Northern Ireland never justified the spilling of one drop of blood."

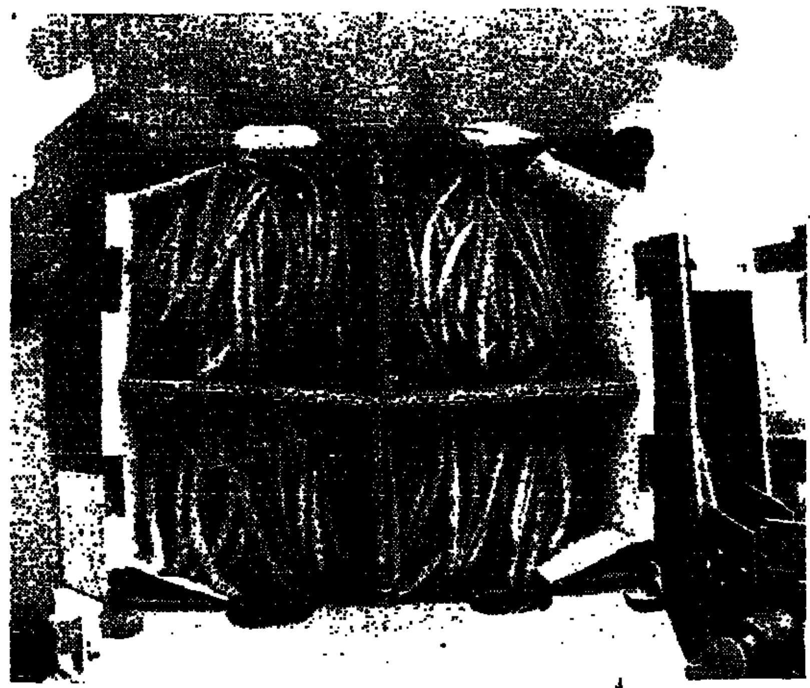
Yet her election bears witness not only to her personal integrity, but also to a wider context of social change in the North. If Southern voters were prepared to accept her, this is in part because she represents a new kind of northern Catholic, still victim of the subtler forms of cultural discimination, but less impoverished, less lumpenproletarian, less troublesome. McAleese is their standard-bearer — the newly-emergent Ulster Catholic professional middle classes, the first generation fully to benefit from the reforms of the last twenty years. At a stroke, her victory completes the transformation of the Irish question from an exercise in class warfare into an issue of moral and human rights.

Yet her embourgeoisement, if it makes her more "acceptable" both south of the border and to certain tendencies within Ulster Unionism, does not deprive her of her origins and her memory. As director of the Institute of Professional Legal Studies at Queen's since 1987, she has emerged as one of the most articulate and intelligent representatives of a whole swathe of experience that many, both north and *south, would prefer to* be able to ignore. Her rise to power (of a sorts) demonstrates the heterogeneous nature of contemporary Irish identity, which in some ways the Robinson presidency, with its feel-good overload, may only have served to hide.

McAleese's scope for manoeuvre is extremely limited on paper, but wide-ranging in practice. Early hints that she wishes to be seen as president of "all the Irish" — that is, of the whole island of Ireland, — give perhaps some indication of what she may be capable of. Social reformers and party animals might have prefered a more liberal, even a more easy-going figure. But her combination of moral rectitude and political sophistication puts her in a strong position to inject a little more reality into what has all too often been a largely imaginary relationship between the two sides of this disunited nation. What "the plain people of Ireland" will

Exporters pitch for better deal

Exporters complain that while the government has lent an ear to their concerns, it has yet to really start hearing them. **Aziza Sami** reports





Export promotion is receiving more attention from the government, but exporters say much more needs to be done *photo: Nour Sobeih*

The adoption of 11 new cabinet decrees last week indicate that export promotion has climbed a notch higher on the government's list of priorities.

The decrees range from linking private and public sector exporters through councils, to giving the private sector free rein to establish airlines.

But these initiatives may fall short of the expectations of private businessmen, on whose shoulders the burden of exports has been placed.

Nine major organisations embracing the nation's exporters still await further action to meet their long-standing demands for improving export performance.

In a paper submitted recently to the Supreme Council for Exports, business federations called for wide-ranging monetary, legislative and bureaucratic changes which reduce the costs of their operations.

They also called for a reduction of the tax burden on exporters, such as decreasing the sales tax on capital assets, production lines and spare parts, as well as implementing a tax rebate system on imported material used in the manufacture of export commodities. Exporters have also drawn attention to the issue of funding, asking that the state direct part of its resources to subsidise export operations.

From major marketing drives to modern information systems through the Internet and covering non-commercial risk, exporters feel the government has to undertake a major drive to help establish industries that produce export goods and not simply export excess production.

Exporters also feel they have been overlooked by the latest investment incentives law, which failed to provide them with the same tax privileges offered to New Valley projects.

One welcome change introduced by the new decrees is giving the private sector the right to set up airlines and to provide airport services.

This decree, called for by President Hosni Mubarak, came as a result of a growing need to boost private sector shipping and transportation enterprises.

"We need to give incentives to investors and clear up the channels in the bureaucracy which cause problems and cost money," said Economy Minister Youssef Boutros-Ghali recently.

Boutros-Ghali admits that the government has been tardy in tackling the issue of exports. Having focused instead since 1991 on "attaining macroeconomic stability and liberalising the monetary system," it was not until late 1995 that exports started to figure on the government's agenda.

Now, with the exception of the petroleum sector, declining exports have become a pressing concern for both the private sector and the government.

According to economists, the economy cannot maintain its current growth rate of 6.7 per cent, redress the chronic trade deficit, or absorb 500,000 new job seekers annually, if it does not substantially increase its export levels. As a result, with the new decrees in place, the cabinet is currently studying an ambitious export promotion plan aimed at tripling the level of exports to $12 billion annually.

The dispute between the government and exporters over what constitutes export promotion strategies was aired during a recent conference organised by the Ministry of Economy and sponsored by the US management consultancy firm, McKinsey.

"The basic principle [in the export promotion plan] is that economic growth will come exclusively through exports," said Boutros-Ghali. "We must live and breathe exports." But exporters say that for this to be more than empty promises, the government should redefine its current priorities which favour macroeconomic growth and stability, often to the detriment of exporters.

Ironically, exporters feel that it is they who have borne the cost of economic reform, mainly because of the negative impact some of the liberalisation policies have had on their export operations.

"Reforms have seriously affected exporters' abilities to compete abroad, leaving them with a lot of additional costs which only the government can relieve," said Galal El-Zorba, chairman of the Egyptian Exporters Association.

The stabilisation of the exchange rate is cited as one example.

"The current exchange rate policy cannot be described as being pro-export," said Alaa Arafa, a garment exporter. "With the Egyptian pound tied to the dollar, it appreciated against all other foreign currencies over the past year, causing great losses to exporters. We would like to put the exchange rate policy on the table as a very important issue."

But Boutros-Ghali argued that "deregulation is not a choice, but a necessary part of the government's stabilisation effort."

"The export promotion drive in some sectors could be accelerated more until our inflation rate, which is around 4.2 per cent, reaches that of our trading partners, which is in the range of 3.2 per cent," he said. "Once we reach this level, any productivity gains will translate into an improvement of competitiveness in the export sector."

Exporters, however, are not convinced. Mounir Fakhri Abdel-Nour, a foodstuffs exporter, said that "we are not advocating the devaluaion of the Egyptian pound, but the current situation confronting Egyptian exports to countries other than the US cannot be ignored." His solution to the problem: tying the Egyptian pound to a basket of currencies to hedge against fluctuations.

Other liberaisation policies have also had a negative impact on exports.

"The current customs tariffs structure should be reviewed if we are to improve exports," said Ihab El-Messiri, a garments exporter. "Our customs tariffs have been distorted by virtue of the GATT agreements, which have reduced customs on ready-made goods and left raw materials priced high."

"At a time when tariffs on ready-made garments have been reduced by 110 per cent, we find cotton yarns reduced by only 40 per cent," he said. "This doesn't really help exporers who need to reduce their production costs."

The government still has to take its reform policy a step beyond simply working to realse macroeconomic stability, said Abdel-Nour. Exporters' needs must be addressed, he emphassed.

"We should address issues such as nonetary policies, which are part of the stabilisaton effort but also have a negative impact on exporters," he said. "We cannot just hope for incresed productivity to make up for exporters' losses."

Egypt escapes Hong Kong fallout

While the crash in the Southeast Asian markets shook the ground under most international capital markets, Egypt's exchange emerged unscathed. **Sherine Abdel-Razek** looks at the reasons why

Financial experts, brokers and investors around the world spent the last two weeks in panic, watching and waiting for the end result of the Southeast Asian market crash. But in Egypt, there was barely a ripple.

While the crash dragged down the Dow Jones, Egypt's General Market Index closed only 3 points lower than its opening value for the trading week ending 30 October.

The only substantial loss that the market suffered was a nine-point drop in the GMI on 28 October. But on the next day, it climbed back up.

In the past, investors and brokers had voiced complaints that the Egyptian market was still essentially isolated from its international counterparts. This, say market experts, was its saving grace following the crash.

Ali Lotfi, former Egyptian prime minister and professor of financing at Cairo's Ain Shams University, believes that the main factors protecting the Egyptian market from the worldwide stock market crisis were the limited number of foreign shares traded on the local market (about three per cent of total transactions), and the low value of the Egyptian shares traded in the international markets. Shares of only five Egyptian companies, with a total value of $500 million, are traded in international markets.

He added that the Egyptian economy is also protected by the stability of the exchange rates and the increase in foreign reserves. These factors both help in stabilising the value of the Egyptian pound and, therefore, the share value of Egyptian companies.

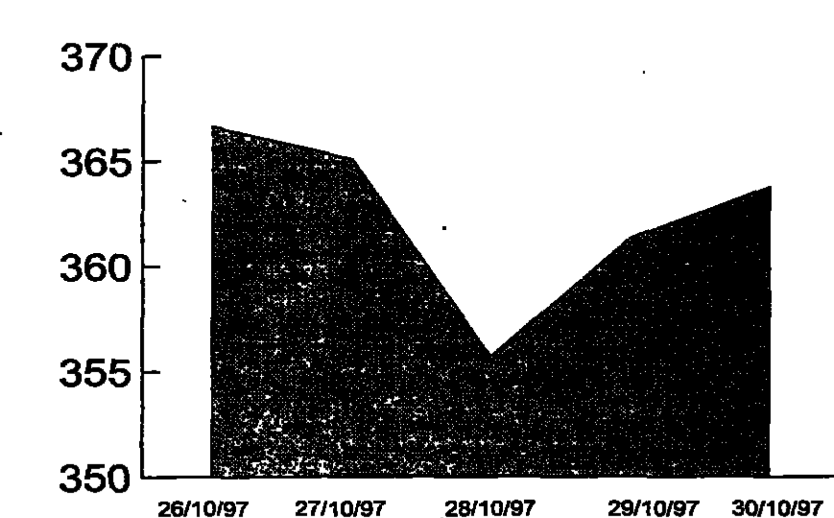
The Hong Kong stock exchange crash stemmed from fears that the local currency, pegged to the US dollar, is vulnerable to speculative attacks. This triggered a wave of selloffs on the market.

Hani Tawfik, president of International Investors, a private equity management group, agrees with Lotfi.

"We have a very shallow stock exchange with a relatively limited volume of daily transactions that might be executed in an hour," he said.

Tawfik pointed out that it was not only the small size, but also the nature of the transactions that helped the Egyptian market. Egypt's stock market is based on spot transactions, he said, which means that investors acquire the shares immediately on paying for them. In foreign markets, brokers cover most of the purchase while investors only pay low margins. This system is risky given that in the case of a crash, brokers rush to sell in order to get back their money. This causes even more panic.

Egypt's exchange is not really prone to this because its small size limits the volume of losses, said Tawfik. Egyptian exchange records for 28-29 October prove this point.



The decline in the GMI on 28 October was caused by foreign investors trying to liquidate their holdings in the Egyptian market in order to invest in the markets that had crashed, with stock prices dropping sharply.

But on 29 October, to stem the drop, Egyptian investment funds entered the market as buyers, pushing the index up by five points.

Psychology also had a role in the events of 28 October, explained Wagdi Sharkas, an American University in Cairo accounting and finance professor.

Local investors panicked when they saw foreign investors selling their holdings, he said. The drop in the value of Egyptian Global Depository Receipts (GDRs) on the London stock exchange that same day also fueled local investor fears.

The GDRs of five Egyptian companies — the Commercial International Bank, Suez Cement, Al Ahram Beverages, Misr International Bank and the Paints and Chemical Industries — are traded on the London stock exchange.

During the crisis, experts were worried that any sharp decline in the GDR prices of these companies, which are the leaders of the local market, could deal a heavier blow to the Egyptian market.

While the Egyptian market was spared the problems of its international counterparts, market experts disagree on whether the shock in other markets could, in fact, be a blessing in disguise for the Egyptian market.

A survey conducted by the International Finance Corporation last week showed that the Egyptian exchange, together with a number of the African markets, are among the most desirable and safest options for investment funds given the Asian market turmoil.

The survey predicted that these markets will attract 25 per cent of the total investments currently in Asia.

Mona Qassem, head of Banque Misr's research department, believes that the Egyptian market will attract the investments fleeing these markets according to the potential growth in its price/earning (P/E) ratio. This ratio reached 25 in the Asian markets, indicating that prices reached the saturation level which precedes a sharp decline. The Egyptian market, with a maximum P/E ratio of 12, still has a long way to go before reaching this level.

Other factors working to the advantage of the Egyptian market include the fact that the country's economic reform programme has put an end to the dollarisation process, stabilised market forces and decreased the intrest rates in comparison to the stock maket yields.

Nashaat Abdel-Aziz, a financial investment consultant with the Egyptians Abroad Investment and Development Company, a financial group with brokerage and fund management activities, is not so optimistic.

The Egyptian market will not be swamped by foreign investments previously in the Southeast Asian markets mainly because all financial institutions and investment funds have specified asset allocation plans, he said.

These funds and institutions channel their investments to different markets, according to the market's weight as figured in their plans. These weights are calculated according to the risk and yield criteria. The Egyptian market's stake may have increased due to the stability it demonstrated during the crisis, but this does not mean that Egypt will get a large share of the investments from Southeast Asia.

Ali Lotfi warned that the foreign investments in the Egyptian stock market must not exceed 20 per cent of the overall investments in order not to jeopardise the stability of the exchange as was the case in the Mexican crisis two years ago when foreign investors suddenly divested their interest in the market, leading to a crash.

MENA victims?

Political differences between Cairo and Doha over the upcoming MENA conference may have undermined the already fragile status of Egyptian workers in Qatar. **Mona El-Fiqi** reports

It is no secret that Egypt and Qatar do not see eye to eye on the political convenience of having the Gulf state host the upcoming fourth conference for Middle East/North African economic development and cooperation (MENA) in Doha on 16 November. The hushed-up story, however, is that this difference of opinion has topped a list of other reasons that have caused a serious drop — some sources estimate by 50 per cent — in the number of Egyptian labourers in the rich Gulf state.

Over the last few months differences between the two countries over MENA IV have come into increasingly sharp focus. Egypt has declared that holding MENA IV — as scheduled — under the current Israeli-caused stalemate in the peace process would be contrary to Palestinian and Arab interests. Qatar, meanwhile, states that regional economy and politics have become two separate files. Besides, Qatar argues, Egypt hosted MENA III last year under similar conditions.

According to Egyptian officials, this political rift accelerated an ongoing drive to reduce the volume of Egyptian workers in Qatar.

"Over the last six months Qatar stopped issuing any visas or work permits to Egyptian labourers [seeking jobs there]," said Abdel-Qader El-A'ssar, counsellor for international cooperation at the Ministry of Manpower and Immigration.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for its part, confirmed that Qatar has indeed refused to grant visas to Egyptians in the past few months, but plays down the significance of this development. Foreign ministry officials argue that Egypt's stance regarding MENA was only the latest of several recent problems facing Egyptians seeking jobs in the Gulf states.

"We have to look at what is happening [in Qatar] in the larger context of the general trend in the Gulf states to reduce the number of foreign labourers to allow more room for their native workforce," said Moustafa Abdel-Aziz, assistant to the foreign minister.

Moreover, said Abdel-Aziz, "We cannot deny the fact that some Egyptians go to these Gulf countries without having signed a finalised contract as they should; and this puts them in legal trouble that in some cases ends up with having these workers deported."

He added that in many cases the workers travel to their work destinations without possessing the official documents necessary because they were made offers by unlicensed recruitment companies.

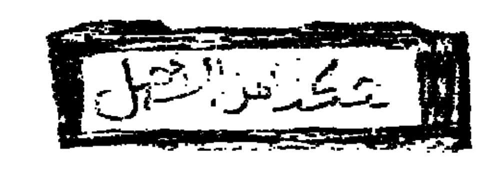
"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is trying to combat such illegal practices by establishing a new department that will be solely responsible for providing citizens with information about the legal perquisites for working overseas," said Abdel-Aziz. This new department will be operational starting next January. It will have hotlines to answer callers' queries. It will also print out brochures that will be distributed in all the authorised recruitment offices.

Although Egyptians in Qatar are only a fraction of these, currently standing at 22,000, officials regret the loss of a good working relationship between Egypt and Qatar in this field.

"It is such a pity," lamented Al-A'ssar, of the ministry of manpower and immigration. According to him "Qatar used to have one of the best arrangements by which the Egyptian Ministry of Manpower and Immigration and the Qatari Ministry of Labour coordinated the streamlining of Egyptian labourers for the Qatari market."

Said one diplomat, who asked that his name be withheld, "There is no denying that closer political relations could help contain such problems. Egypt is trying very had to maintain good ties with all potential workers markets but sometimes serious political issues are at stake."

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**





Another bundle of fallacies

To go or not to go: that is not the question, writes Mohamed El-Imam. The process itself must be abandoned

Doha has managed to attract universal attention, becoming the focal point of a debate over whether the Arabs should attend the so-called "Summit Conference" for Middle East/North Africa economic cooperation? Should they, Egypt in particular, attempt to prove that they are serious in working toward peace, and embarrass Israel, whatever "embarrassment" may mean? Or should they consider the situation as a self-service counter, where some order a hamburger and others walk out with a soft drink, while the rest look for a more respectable joint? Everyone remembers the Arab summit held in Cairo, and the clear decision taken there to resist the irresponsible behaviour of the Israeli government, its disrespect for the agreements it had signed, and its refusal to acknowledge the elementary rules of the peace process.

The above points, I believe, are irrelevant. True, there is a problem: the Doha conference is a date which cannot be simply ignored. But more fundamental questions have yet to be posed. Doha is a part of process. The question of whether or how it should be attended implies acceptance of the process itself. To decide whether or not we accept this process, we have to examine three issues: the philosophy behind it, the objectives of its promoters, and the costs and benefits for the parties concerned. I would argue that the process is a fallacy; the promoters have nothing to do with the primary actors in the region; and the latter are sufficiently heterogeneous to make the process self-defeating. If this is true, not only should the Doha conference be cancelled, but the whole process should be abandoned, for the sake of peace — a lasting peace.



The philosophy behind the conference is the product of two concepts. The first is that more active cooperation between regional powers provides a guarantee that peace will last once it is achieved; the second is that an early commitment to the process works to the benefit of peace. The whole idea of the peace process supposedly stems from the regionalist ideology which marked the first half of the century, and was manifested concretely in the second half. From 1945 onward, Europe abandoned its (world) wars for a Union that has gradually expanded within the continent, and established strong ties with neighbours, starting with the Arab countries surrounding the Mediterranean. Even Germany, most noted for its belligerence during the first half of this century, advocates a united Europe.

The argument for united Europe is based on three experiences, none of which are valid for the Arab world. The first is the peace that prevailed after World War II. The main question was not how to achieve peace, but how to manage it. Second, the belligerent force was completely and undeniably defeated. This was both a necessary and a sufficient condition for the peace-makers to accomplish their task. Third, all parties shared similar cultural reference systems, which made it possible to contemplate "social cohesion". Neither economic forces nor political decisions could have been effective in a heterogeneous set of communities. "European" means something to everybody, whatever the existing national boundaries.

Clearly, we are not only far from peace, but are consistently pushed off the path that could lead to a settlement, in spite of Arab determination. This is because, despite the achievements of the October War, the belligerent force in the region continues to maintain both a Herculean war machine and an aggressive attitude, while the victims of war are unable either to carry off a decisive victory or to sustain a lasting peace. They participate in the peace process on unequal terms, since they do not have equivalent military capabilities. The European experience was quite different in this respect: the victors, in arguing for peace, disposed of the means by which to enforce it.

Second, the aggressive party is neither defeated nor even satisfied with its conquests. The objectives and the boundaries of the transplanted entity called Israel are neither its ultimate goals nor limits which it will respect in the future. By definition, it is a racist, expansionist entity. Its methods include seizing more land, deporting Palestinians, and taking over the economies of its neighbours to achieve its national objectives.

This is due to the third factor, namely that Israel, again by definition, claims to represent a unique culture. This culture cannot be integrated; it must retain its pure, undiluted form, since this was one of the original raisons d'être of a state for the Jews. Clearly, it is completely irrational to envisage a process of integration that will lead to the creation of a homogeneous "Middle East" composed of Arabs, Iranians, Turks — although these, at least, have Islam in common — brought together for the sole purpose of including Israel, originally conceived on the basis of fundamental difference.

It may be argued that integration is a goal of the past, and that we live in a new era of regionalism, where disparity is the rule, assuming, among others, the absence of the social proximity condition, but at the same time not going so far as the common market approach requires. This has nothing to do with using regional cooperation as a means of establishing or preserving peace. It assumes peace as a given, is meant to justify and facilitate the process of plundering the globe under the pretext of globalisation, and speeds up the shift towards freer trade as advocated by the World Trade Organisation. In a sense, it is an intermediary step towards the whole, rather than the part represented by the region. In this perspective, the individual countries of the region can go a long way on their own or in collaboration, as long as collaboration offers more than what can be achieved individually. This is as far as the free movement of goods, services and capital is concerned; the movement of human beings, especially labour, is an exception since advocates of neo-regionalism consider that migration, especially from less developed countries, should be stopped. The second component of the process is piece-meal cooperation in certain sectors and/or on certain projects, but this is a different story.

The problem, then, boils down to the timing of regional cooperation. Here we run up against an incontrovertible dilemma. If cooperation is indeed to unleash the dividends of peace, therefore guaranteeing the success of the process, the idea that such cooperation can (and should) be initiated irrespective of firm commitment to the peace process is absurd. It only has meaning in the context of blind Arab adherence to peace and cooperation, regardless of Israel's hostility. They will have to do it in the future — so goes the logic — and they might as well learn the lesson now. Can this be described by any term other than humiliation?

The vulgarity of this policy was inadvertently confirmed by the US ambassador in Qatar, who stated that the summit would be meaningless if held in Israel's absence. In his opinion, as well as that of the secretary of state, the whole region is a worthless lot; the ceremony is designed for Israel. Madeleine Albright is determined to send a strong American delegate, if only to enjoy a cup of coffee (not Arabic coffee, of course). This is her way of proving the impartiality of the main sponsor of the so-called peace process. In other words, we should stop speaking about a region called the Middle East. The accurate name is Israel-plus.

If the benefits are not meant to affirm commitment to the peace process or the importance of the Arab role, then, whose interests are at stake here? It is no secret that the US Council on Foreign Relations initiated the series of economic summits, and that paragraph 10 of the Casablanca Declaration, issued at the first conference in 1994, welcomed "the establishment of a Middle East/North Africa Economic Strategy Group by the Council. This private sector group", the declaration continued, "will recommend strategies for cooperation and ways to overcome obstacles to trade and private investment." Thus, Arab countries are being advised by the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development to prevent their own governments from planning their own development; they are all considered affiliates to a (global) private sector tailored by the United States. Rather than stemming from social needs, such advice emerges from the malfunctioning of the US economy, characterised by indebtedness, severe unemployment and soaring social problems. On the other hand, the US has twisted regionalism in order to dominate all the regions, however remote geographically, economically or socially. The Middle East is a particular favourite in this respect, provided it is cleansed of Arabs and Arab interests.

The success of the Doha conference, it has been said, depends on the separation of the political and economic tracks. In fact, the reverse is true: the economic track has been designed along political lines, in the sense that big business now dictates policy. Transnational corporations have taken the lead, thanks to Davos, and democracy, let alone the wishes and interests of the region's peoples, is better not spoken of. Two main questions have yet to be resolved: what have the last three conferences achieved? And what will happen after Doha? Another conference? Where, and, more importantly, why? The Arabs have enough problems to deal with, and should not be held responsible for curing US ills, including the bloated aid package Israel receives. A hands-off policy will be more conducive to peace; the more intricate Arab-Israeli economic ties are, the higher the possibilities of conflict, including armed conflict. The apple is rotten to the core; better to discard it altogether.

The writer is an economist and a former minister of planning.

Privatising the peace pie

Just another summit: as we worry about public relations, writes Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil, the dividends of peace are being served up and devoured

The US insists on going ahead with MENA IV, to be held in Doha this month, in spite of the fact that all the bilateral tracks in the Middle East peace negotiations have come to a halt. This insistence stems from the influence of the US Committee on Foreign Relations and the International Economic Forum (Davos), which maintain that it is possible to leap over all the current political minefields in the peace process by separating the "political track" from the "economic track". The idea is to promote economic relations between the Arab and Israeli business communities, under the sponsorship of international financial circles, thereby creating an advanced form of "normalisation and economic cooperation" between the Arabs and Israel. Implicitly, of course, Israel will continue its occupation of Arab territories — southern Lebanon, the Golan Heights and the West Bank — and will be able to avoid the principles established in Madrid concerning the final settlement of the issues of Jerusalem, the Palestinian state and Palestinian refugees.

Never before in the history of international negotiations has the "economic cart" been put so squarely before the "political horse." It is precisely this inverse thinking that has encouraged Binyamin Netanyahu and his supporters to grow increasingly obstinate. With the prospect of economic gains (as well as the lifting of the Arab boycott), without "land for peace", Israel has everything to gain and nothing to lose. It stands to win security, economic penetration of the Arab world, full normalisation in every domain, and even a "secure occupation" as some have termed it, without having to give up land or sovereignty over the occupied Arab territories, and without having to abide by the negotiating framework established by the Oslo Accords.

Little wonder, therefore, that there is such urgency to hold the Doha conference on time. The US and Israel are only acting in character, and heaping greater humiliation on the Arabs in the process. Their rule — no linkage between the political and economic tracks — is intended to deprive the Arabs of their negotiating cards, one after the other, so as to avoid a "final", or even an "intermediary", settlement.

Official US administration statements have been pitched to push the Arabs into accepting this mode of inverse thinking. In a press interview on 25 June 1997, the US ambassador in Qatar said: "Canceling the economic summit means stopping the peace process." This is an amazing statement. It means that these conferences have become the sole gauge for "progress" in the "peace process", since they give the impression that things are moving forward although, in fact, the peace process has died. The Arabs are expected to fall for this farce, instead of asking the US to pressure Israel to return to the principles of Madrid, and abide by the Oslo Accords and the timetable for redeploying Israeli forces, so that the parties can finally sit down to negotiate over the remaining issues.

Ambassador Robert Pelletreau, former US secretary for Middle East affairs, has also written: "It is time that Arab leaders stop putting their long-term interests at the mercy of the vicissitudes of the negotiating process." He adds: "The US gives great importance to the Doha summit because of its contribution to economic integration in the region."

Cleverly couched between these two statements is a clear message to the Arabs: we must accept the inverse relationship between the economic and political components, and toe the line of regional economic progress as all political considerations plummet further into oblivion. Of course, it is difficult to conceive what form of economic progress and cooperation can survive on such a minefield. The logical order of events, one would imagine, would be to establish a just and lasting political settlement so as to provide a secure and fertile foundation for healthy economic relations. The end to the Vietnam conflict serves as a case in point. US troop withdrawals and peace negotiations began in the mid-1970s, but the normalisation of Vietnam's relations with its neighbours and with the US began in the 1990s, and then only modestly. There must first be a period of convalescence to allow the wounds to heal and to ensure that the root causes of the conflict are resolved before moving on to new and thorny ground.

But in the case of the Middle East, the operative word seems to be haste. The rush to impose a formula for economic cooperation between the Arabs and Israel under Shimon Peres's conception of a "new Middle East order" conforms to international economic interests and the need to open up the Arab economies to Western investment and business, with Israel acting as their accredited middleman. It is at this juncture that the lines of Israel's "security interests" and the Israeli right's ambitions for a "Greater Israel" converge; it is also where Israel's economic interests, many of which are rooted in Jewish financial and business concerns abroad, and in the US in particular, intersect with those of international business.

Here, too, we find the philosophy behind MENA IV, a philosophy which aims to "privatise the peace process" in accordance with the blueprint laid out by Claus Schwabb, the founder of the International Economic Forum in Davos. According to Schwabb, "The peace-making process in the Middle East is far too important and complex to leave to politicians and diplomats. Commercial and economic relations have a vital role to play. Business circles can prepare the ground by creating a system for mutual dependence, thereby encouraging the governments to take further steps toward peace."

The purpose of MENA IV and other such conferences has thus been clearly defined. It is to create a new network of direct links between the business communities of the countries of the Middle East, bypassing their respective governments and official diplomatic channels and creating pressure groups and other mechanisms to hasten normalisation and economic cooperation with Israel at the expense of the Arabs' legitimate political rights. There is not the slightest doubt that this inverse logic, which puts economic cooperation before a political settlement, ultimately serves the interests of Israel, which rejects the principle of land for peace. At the same time, it serves international financial interests, and enables the absorption of Israel into the global economic infrastructure and its assimilation into the Arab economic system, particularly in the Gulf region. In short, such conferences offer tantalising prospects of more gains, secured by new guarantees.

However, putting aside for a moment all this commotion over Doha, let us look at some more significant facts. With every passing day, the Arabs are confronted with new realities on the ground as Israel seeks to push ahead with its scheme for forced regional economic cooperation. As the Egyptian journalist Salaheddin Hafez put it: "The new Middle East order is being advanced by means of Israeli settlements. The expansion and creation of new settlements generate new economic realities every day. These settlements are, in effect, new long-range economic ventures. They are located at strategic junctures so as to generate a new system of economic belts that penetrate the Arab world to the east, the west and in the Gulf, rendering them impossible to dismantle in the future."

The US wants a new "Middle Eastern order" with Israel as its economic, financial and technological leader. Israel wants to secure its access to the vital economic sphere of the Arab world, a connection it will use to barter with the West and the "First World." The "Middle Eastern order" is Israel's ultimate strategic goal. It is a long-range enterprise, to be implemented in phases. The current phase, for Netanyahu and his supporters, involves creating an economic triangle along Benelux lines. Comprising Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian entity, this triangle is to serve as the primary spearhead for Israel's economic penetration of the Arab world. The Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty has already brought this phase into operation.

The second phase of the strategy will be to create "regional enterprises", intended to ensure that Israel retains control over road networks, the flow of commerce, channels of finance and technological development in the region. It is sufficient, by way of example, to cite the project for transporting petroleum and gas from the Gulf to Haifa, the designs for a highway network that locates Israel at its hub, and such tourist projects as the "Red Sea Riviera" scheme.

Although many of these enterprises have been put forward for discussion in the multilateral negotiations, the Arabs have yet to determine how they might benefit or harm each Arab country individually, and the Arab economy as a whole. For example, what impact would the Haifa project have on the port of Beirut, or on the income generated by the Suez Canal? Before any further steps are taken in this direction, the Arabs must form working teams at the country and regional levels in order to assess the potential economic and political ramifications of such enterprises, because for the moment it appears that Israel stands to gain the largest slice of the "peace pie."

These are the areas that should command our attention. We should take a hard look at what is happening on the ground, not at public relations conferences which only serve to create the illusion of peace, stall for time, and numb our ability to react. We will wake up to a more painful reality when it is too late to change. In short, the Arabs must prove that they are not dupes.

The writer is professor of economics at Cairo University.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Iraq has suffered enough

Tensions are rapidly mounting over Iraq's demand that the United Nations remove all the Americans from its inspection team. The US has described Saddam Hussein's actions in this matter as "direct threat to the United Nations", arguing that it represents Iraq's noncompliance with UN-imposed sanctions.

But this situation is not so much one of Iraq versus the UN, but the US versus Iraq. The sanctions, imposed immediately after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, are still in place primarily as an American initiative, albeit one veiled in the language of international justice. Few countries, other than the US and Great Britain, have so stridently expressed their wish to see these sanctions maintained. And the US, by its own admission, is using them as a means of containing Iraq, given that efforts to remove Hussein from power have failed.

In this light, the US reaction to Iraq's decision raises the question: how far will the US be willing to go to carry through with this charade of justice that ultimately has hurt every Iraqi but the one at whom the sanctions were allegedly aimed.

Although diplomatic options are still available, especially with a mediation effort by the UN, the Clinton administration has not ruled out a military response.

However, if the US was able to gather support during the Gulf War, it will find no such help from the Arabs this time.

The current crisis is much too dangerous — its repercussions too widespread — to risk a military confrontation, especially when Iraq has not sought to prevent the other UN inspectors from carrying out their job. This is, after all, the main concern.

If the international community is intent on ensuring that Iraq's weapons are destroyed, then it should not matter whether the inspectors are British, Swedish or American.

But any efforts to use force as a means of compliance will effectively transform the nature of the sanctions and the inspections from regulatory policies to directives endorsed by an international body that has been transformed into a US foreign policy tool.

Al-Ahram Weekly

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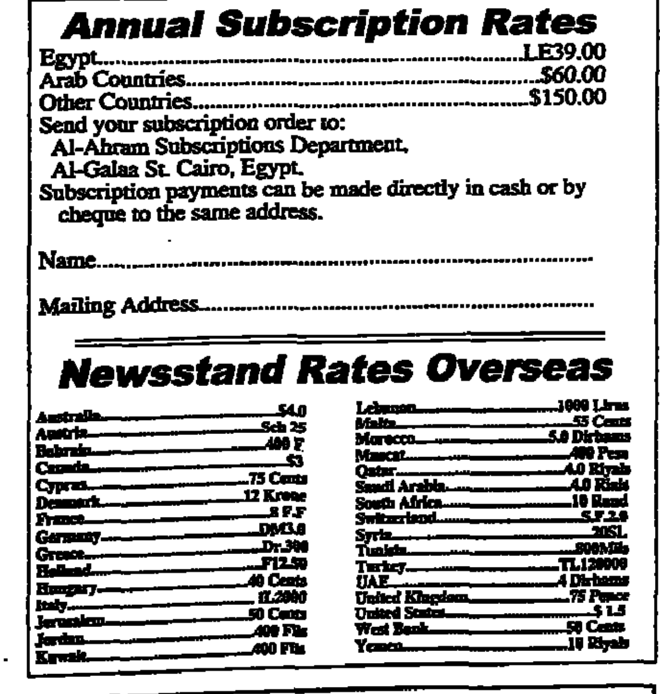
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Doha prerequisites

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed addresses a number of unresolved issues still hanging over the Doha economic conference as it prepares to convene in mid-November

In an interview to *Al-Hayat* a few days ago, President Mubarak said that Egypt will announce whether or not it will be attending the Doha economic conference only three or four days before it starts. Given Egypt's centrality, its decision is bound to affect the course of the conference, and announcing that decision at the eleventh hour will place all the other parties before a *fait accompli*.

Washington is adamant that the conference be held on time, regardless of the reservations expressed by many Arab parties, and despite the fact that the peace process is still locked in an impasse. Whatever Qatar's embarrassment, it finds itself committed to hosting the conference on schedule, which raises questions on the credibility of the US as an even-handed sponsor of the peace process.

Can the Doha conference contribute to the advancement of the peace process or is it more likely to add even more obstacles in its path? As we all know, the framework for the peace process as laid down in Madrid was based on a two-track approach: a bilateral track between Israel and each Arab party to implement the land-for-peace tradeoff, and a multilateral track, involving a wide range of states, both regional and global, to build up a network of mutual agreements that would contribute to establishing peace on solid foundations. An important element in the multilateral track is the establishment of economic relations between all the concerned parties, in other words, a Middle East market along the lines of the European Common Market. In preparation for this endeavour, economic conferences have been held annually, first in Casablanca, then in Amman, last year in Cairo and after a few days in Doha.

However, a precondition for the success of the economic conferences is that they go hand in hand with progress in the bilateral talks, i.e., that progress in the implementation of Israeli withdrawals from occupied Arab territories is accompanied by a phased normalisation of relations between Israel and the Arab countries, notably in the field of economic relations. In the absence of either of these two processes, the tradeoff between land and peace will not have been achieved, and the peace process launched in Madrid will have failed.

Netanyahu not only openly declares that he opposes the land for peace tradeoff, but has systematically developed a policy of extending old, and constructing new, Jewish settlements in the occupied Arab territories, including Arab East Jerusalem, in the aim of totally Judaising the Holy City. How can there be talk of a common Middle East market in such conditions?

Some might argue that the situation has not changed qualitatively since last year when the Cairo economic conference was held. But at the time only Syria and Lebanon openly refused to take part in the conference, while today a growing number of Arab states are openly declaring their refusal to participate in the Doha conference, including such key states as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Moreover, Netanyahu seems to be banking that his peace-for-peace formula is workable. He has always maintained that security passes before peace, and that the real meaning of trading peace for peace is trading security for security — with one proviso: that on one side it is the security of Israel that is being negotiated, on the other, the security not of this or that Arab state but of given Arab regimes. The implicit bargain is that the Arab states waive their demand for the restitution of occupied Arab territories in exchange for Israeli support for their security as regimes, whether such support is technical, political or economic, which entails, among other things, interceding on their behalf to include them in the new 'globalist' world economy.

What is still more serious is that just before the Doha conference, and at the very time Israeli-Palestinian talks were being resumed in Washington, Netanyahu sent a team of Mossad hit men to kill leading Hamas activist Khaled Mesha'al in Jordan. The attempt failed, and a deal was struck with Jordan by virtue of which the Mossad agents were handed over to Israel in exchange for the release of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and other Arab prisoners in Israeli jails. Such unethical and illegal agreements, which run counter to the norms of civilised behaviour between states, cannot be reconciled with negotiations, in Washington or Doha, which are assumed to respect the law and the contractual agreements concluded between the parties. A pertinent question here is where does Washington stand with respect to this open violation of international legality? It is a question that acquires even greater pertinence in the context of Netanyahu's proposal to replace the final stage of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations with an overall deal along the lines of the 1978 Camp David agreements.

One argument now being advanced is that if the Arab states give in to Washington's insistence that the Doha conference should go ahead as planned, they could put to profitable use the growing tension between the Clinton administration and Netanyahu, whose intransigence and obstructionism damage the image of the United States and threaten its vital interests, notably oil, throughout the region. So far, however, the Clinton administration, though faced with a growing discrepancy between attempts to build a Middle East common market and progress in the peace process, has not adopted a more severe attitude towards Netanyahu, but still seems closer to the latter's views than to the principles advocated by the US itself as a basis for the peace process.

Moreover, it should be remembered that if the Doha conference does convene on schedule, this would be very embarrassing for many Arab countries friendly to the US, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, both of which have already announced that they will boycott the conference. This could eventually split the Gulf Cooperation council, the Damascus Declaration group, and deeply destabilise the Arab oil region to secure the stability of which the US went to war with Saddam Hussein.

Then there is the question of whether the Europeans can remain aloof if the US proves to be responsible for a major stability breakdown throughout the region. The same applies to Japan, which is heavily dependent on Arab Gulf oil. And what of Russia, which has recently admitted that its involvement in the Middle East is very much below what it should be? To conclude: what would the US administration do if the Arabs proved able to adopt a common stand where they would collectively go to Doha, provided Israel's government commits itself to stop its settlement policy, respect Israel's previous peace engagements and implement the land-for-peace tradeoff — all demands that Netanyahu will not accept without intense pressure from Washington.

Change the shoe

The lack of trust between Arabs and Israelis must be remedied through the creation of shared interests if peace is ever to be achieved, writes **Adel Sabet**

The American-sponsored peace process which is currently encountering rough weather seems to be based on an illogical sequence of arbitrary conclusions. Two fundamental realities intrude upon the efforts of international diplomacy to force unsatisfactory resolutions on both the Arabs and the Israelis. For whereas the Israelis are being asked to deal generously with a defeated Arab nation, the Arabs are asked to accept the crumbs of a barely concealed surrender.

This kind of arrangement has never worked. In the particular context of Arab/Israeli relations, the effort of peacemaking will lead to a lame and inadequate peace. A peace enforced by outside pressure between unequal partners will almost certainly lead to an outbreak of further violence.

In this extraordinary confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians, the power lines are obscure and contradictory. Who is the more powerful contender? America seems to favour Israel, which should therefore enjoy better terms over the vanquished Arabs. Can such conclusions be taken for granted? If so, we must consider them as issuing from a power-indoctrinated society obsessed with the vision of a Messianic world where supermen resolve problems. Rambocracy triumphant, a David and Goliath fairy tale which leads to the wrong conclusions. For in this Palestinian confrontation, Goliath is a sleeping giant who sooner or later is bound to wake up. Only out-and-out racism combined with latter-day messianic illusions can justify such an approach to the current 'peace process'. Complacency here tends to promote dangerous wishful thinking which could have tragic consequences. The Israelis should realise that, for them, the peace imperative is vital. The Arabs, on the other hand, can afford to wait.

Mr Netanyahu is well aware that little Israel with its four million inhabitants is surrounded by a 300 million-strong Arab world who will not forget the humiliation of an unfair treaty. For Netanyahu, therefore, Israel's ability to survive will depend on its continued possession of weapons of mass destruction in the shape of a score of nuclear warheads. This leads to the grim reality that on no account will Israel shed its nuclear shield until and unless the Arabs can convince it of their absolute determination not to resort to war at any time at any future date. Under the circumstances, demanding Israeli nuclear disarmament appears unusually optimistic.

On the other hand, the provocative policies followed since the election of Netanyahu suggest that a radical shortsighted political presence with neo-Nazi undertones exists in the background of his party. This has introduced into the peace process an antagonistic tone which regards the Arabs with hostility. Such emotions all too often lead to tempestuous and irresponsible actions. The presence of a nuclear threat in the background is ominous. Clearly the whole matter will boil down to an issue of lack of confidence and trust in a continued Arab determination to maintain the peace. Logic would suggest that, instead of attempting to force an oversized foot into a narrow shoe, diplomacy would be better advised to develop the ways and means to promote the missing confidence and to build a relationship of trust: in other words, change the shoe.

Muslims and Jews lived peacefully side by side for centuries under Arab or Muslim protection. A present-day solution to the lack of trust, I believe, could reside in the establishment of an Arab/Muslim common market grouping the 22 member states of the Arab League with the Muslim nations of Asia and Africa into a giant economic union which would include Israel as a valued member.

Sharing in a fundamental common interest such as the building of prosperity is a safe path to mutual confidence, which will discourage even the most extremist elements from indulging in political conflicts and military raids. Membership in an Arab-Islamic common market would offer the Israelis a satisfactory and mutually beneficial bond with their neighbours and should eventually dispel the lack of trust which causes Israel to cling to its nuclear arsenal.

Food production should be a prime goal in such a common market. A quadrupling of the food output of member states is feasible and could lead to a substantial reduction in the cost of feeding a demographic explosion. The funding for appropriate agricultural development should be available without much difficulty. A campaign to produce more food will also create jobs and increase purchasing power.

A broad programme of agricultural development could lead to the generation of capital which can be channeled into other productive fields, especially education. Ultimately, education and knowledge are the essential ingredients in the development of harmony and the eradication of ignorant extremism.

The writer is former head of the Foreign Information Office of the Arab League.

Literavore

By Naguib Mahfouz

Ever since my student days, I dreamed of seeing something I had written appear in print. I was fascinated with every aspect of writing, and was always on the look-out for something to write, be it a story, or an article. At that time I wrote articles on literary criticism in *Al-Maarifa*.

I presented reviews of works by Bernard Shaw, Ibsen or Chekov, considered at the time the pillars of modern theatre.

I also visited galleries and wrote art critiques. I used to publish my articles in literary magazines such as *Al-Magalla Al-Gadida, Al-Hadith, Al-Shabab and Al-Maarifa*, the last of which was owned by Abdel-Aziz El-Islambouli.

Although Salama Moussa, the editor of *Al-Magalla Al-Gadida*, and I forged an early friendship which thrived for years, I did not make the acquaintance of Abdel-Aziz El-Islambouli until much later, when we met at the famous El-Fishawi café. From that day on, we forged a solid friendship, which lasted until his death. I remember him as both an enlightened and courteous man and a short-story writer.

I was delighted to learn that his son, Essam Al-Islambouli, a lawyer, had plans to publish a literary magazine. Such a publication would satisfy a deep need and fill a gap left when *Al-Maarifa* went out of circulation. *Al-Maarifa* published philosophical and literary articles by renowned thinkers like Sheikh Mustafa Abdel-Razeq and Mansour Fahmi, in addition to interviews with men of the calibre of Lutfi El-Sayed.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week
Questions of access

Al-Ahali: "There is nothing unusual in considering Sinai as Egypt's eastern gateway as all the invasions in its long history came through Sinai. The problem with Sinai is that it has always remained an open desert, difficult to defend. Developing Sinai has always been one of the prerequisites of Egyptian national security because this would constitute a deterrent in its own right. Now that the Nile waters have reached Sinai, great opportunities have been created for investors and young graduates. If Sinai has been rendered a demilitarised zone through the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement, the arrival of Nile water will soon make it an integral part of Egypt and a natural defence against any aggressor."
(Amina El-Naqash, 29 October)

Al-Ahram: "Strengthening economic cooperation with the nations of East Asia is very much in Egypt's interest and could lead to more job opportunities and higher living standards. The president's visit to Malaysia is a big step forward in that it not only underlines the eastward direction in Egyptian diplomacy but also Egypt's strategic cooperation with the nations of the south. If increased cooperation with Russia, China and Malaysia is the result of Egypt looking to the east, cooperation between Egypt and the nations of the south will be the fruit of the Kuala Lumpur summit."
(Ibrahim Nafie, 31 October)

Al-Wafd: "While Qatar has restricted the entry of Arab nationals, it has opened its doors to the Israelis to explore the area, to do as they please, to issue statements to the detriment of Qatar and harmful to its relations with Arab and Islamic countries. And can Qatar be sure that amongst these Israeli visitors there are no Mossad agents who will carry out terrorist operations which can serve as a pretext for the villain [Netanyahu] to launch an aggression against the Arabs?"
(Gamal Badawy, 1 November)

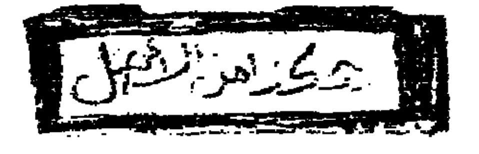
Al-Gomhuria: "The government of Qatar could have consulted the governments of the nations whose citizens it banned, or could at least have been more [illegible] information it had with the governments of these nationals. But it did no such thing. It is worth noting that the Qatar ban is directed, with the exception of Sri Lanka, at Arab and Islamic nations — nations which do everything in their power to combat terrorism within and without their borders and who have quite a store of knowledge about terrorist groups which they can feed to Qatar. Qatar has forgotten that Israel has a long black record of "official" terrorism, the last incident of which was the botched attempt to assassinate Misha'al in Jordan. Qatar should not only ban Israeli visitors, but should also ban members of Israel's official delegation, any one of whom could be a terrorist."
(Mohamed El-Ezaby, 2 November)

Rose El-Youssef: "What is amazing is that the nations whose nationals Qatar has banned do not include Israel, despite its long record of terrorist operations. What is also amazing is that Doha has forgotten that until recently it used to harbour and finance groups which sought to undermine the security of Arab states. Has all this been overlooked? Those who are determined to see the convening of the conference and who get their information from foreign intelligence sources should know that there are reasons for the current tension before talking about sabotage operations."
(Editorial, 3 November)

Al-Usbooe: "After the recovery of Sinai there was only very limited tourist development, such as that at Sharm El-Sheikh and Ras Sudr, but no serious attempts at agriculture. I therefore hope that with the arrival of Nile water thousands of Egyptians will flock to Sinai to cultivate it and make of it a natural defence against any danger. The media has not given enough importance to the diversion of Nile waters and it is only President Mubarak who has highlighted the event by saying: "We will not give Nile water to just anyone, every drop of Nile water will be for Egypt and Egyptian lands."
(Gamal El Ghitani, 3 November)



The empty glass clutched in the hand of a malnourished Iraqi child seems to echo his screams. Iraqis continue to suffer under a US-imposed embargo which has lasted seven long years. The struggle for life — or only existence — without sufficient food, health care or sanitation is imprinted on a family's features: most of the lines are question marks, expressing incomprehension and bewilderment. When, their eyes plead, will the agony end?



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Global values?

At the earliest signs that a financial crisis was threatening to sweep over southeast Asia last August, a flurry of political reactions could be felt. Western powers are accused of adopting imperialist policies to influence ASEAN countries. The ASEAN meeting in Kuala Lumpur was the scene of a quarrel between US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed. The Malaysian premier sparked off the explosion by alluding to certain Western financial corporations which, in a few weeks, are capable of reversing the economic gains which the ASEAN countries have worked long years to achieve. He did not hesitate to repeat his attack, this time even more forcefully, at the G-15 summit held this week.

The campaign launched by the Western media in the aftermath of this dispute only served to highlight the gap between Asian development models and the Western (specifically American) model. The West focused on the questions of democracy, human rights, and the nature of political systems in Asia as a whole.

In reaction, certain southeast Asian leaders called upon the West to recognise the cultural specificity of the Asian nations, which, they argue, are at a stage of development totally different from the experience of the US and of Western countries in general. In addition, the Asian countries have value systems very different from those of the West: the nation takes precedence over the local community, and the community over the individual. In this perspective, development, especially the improvement of education, takes precedence over Western-style democracy.

The West, however, counters these arguments with reference to the case of Japan, where the political system stipulates that leaders be democratically elected.

It matters little to Western businessmen and policymakers, however, whether Asian individuals, whose human rights they uphold so assiduously, are happy, and whether or not their basic needs are fulfilled by the adoption of Western values.

The emerging Asian countries argue that the Western definition of democracy and human rights may not be universally valid. This position has prompted a number of Asian countries to urge for a revision of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, on the grounds that developing countries neither participated in the formulation of that document nor share the values it promotes.

In the West, political decisions coincided with financial and economic interests, reaching a crescendo with the demand for the removal of Malaysia's prime minister. *Time* magazine even attempted to hold the prime minister — rather than Western speculators like Soros — responsible for the financial crisis in Southeast Asia.

The core of the problem is the extent to which small states with new economies are able to resist attempts at financial hegemony on the part of powerful international corporations which seek to influence their political decisions and to dominate their economies.

It is an experience not so far removed from our own. Any observer of the developments taking place in southeast Asia would realise that Egypt is at equal risk of being pressured in the same way. In fact, we may already be feeling the consequences of this bid for global hegemony.

Any success achieved by the G-15 summit in Malaysia in laying the foundations for positive dialogue with the powerful industrialised states could be a step in the right direction for countries of the South, struggling to establish the primacy of their specific interests and values — not least their right to choose their own path to development. If this measure of success is not achieved, developing countries will pay an enormous price in the context of the new world order, whether we call it globalism or not.

Soapbox

Union differences

A storm has been unleashed in the Press Syndicate over journalists who have communicated with Israelis or travelled to Israel for professional or political reasons. The dispute reached its climax after the Egyptian-Israeli meeting in Copenhagen. The disagreement revolved around the council's decision to submit the colleagues who attended this meeting to a commission of inquiry, with the possibility of dismissing them from the syndicate.

It is the duty of the syndicate councils to adhere to all decisions taken unanimously by their general assemblies. The council relies on two main procedures. The first is the law governing the syndicate; the second, the resolutions issued by the general assemblies. The latter expresses the collective views of the members. The decisions of the general assemblies, therefore, must be applied conscientiously.

But as the council knows, the membership of the syndicate is constituted on a professional, not a political basis. In this sense, a syndicate is unlike a political party. The council's adherence to the general assembly's decisions must not force it to violate the essential concept of syndicates, basically democratic organisations which include professionals irrespective of political, ethnic or religious affiliations. Adhering to the assembly's decisions, therefore, may include such measures as a reprimand, an inquiry, or a notice applying to those who violate these decisions, but should not extend to dismissal.

At any rate, all members of the syndicate know that the Arab-Israeli conflict is a very sensitive issue for both political parties and syndicates, and that opposition to normalisation is an Arab and national stance.



This week's Soapbox speaker is a senior Al-Ahram *journalist and member of the Press Syndicate Council.*

Amina Shafik

Bases for coexistence

The true challenge in the creation of a future for Palestine and Israel, writes Edward Said, is to recognise the way in which two histories are organically linked — are, in fact, inseparable

One of the most important differences between Arabs in the Arab world and those who live in the West is that, on a daily basis, the latter are forced to confront the Jewish experience of anti-Semitism and genocide. Year after year, new books, films, articles and photographs pour out in ever-increasing volume. *Schindler's List*, the Steven Spielberg film, put the horrors of the Holocaust before literally hundreds of millions of people. There have been numerous controversies about the reasons for the German catastrophe, how an eminently civilised nation that had produced Europe's greatest philosophers and musicians, and among its most brilliant scientists, poets and scholars, could have descended not just into the madness of Nazism but into the most awful programme of human extermination in history. Anyone who now lives in the United States, France, or elsewhere in Europe can never escape the pictures of Auschwitz and Dachau, the constant reminders of Jewish suffering and torment, the ceaseless evidence of mass inhumanity directed principally against one people, the Jews, who despite their achievements and contributions to culture were reduced to the status of mere animals, to be gassed and cremated by the millions.

It is certainly true that a great deal of this history is not only circulated everywhere in universities, schools, museums, and public discourse in the West, but is also the stuff of controversy, provided most recently by Daniel Goldhagen's book *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. Goldhagen's thesis was that every German, not just the Nazi Party nor only the psychopaths among Hitler's entourage, was prepared to and indeed did carry out the genocide against the Jews.

Most historians have disagreed with this extreme view, but the question of European and more particularly Christian mass guilt continues to exercise the Western world. Among Jewish Americans whose community was spared the horror of what happened in Europe, the Holocaust is fervently studied and memorialised; it is noteworthy, for instance, that Washington is the site of an extremely lavish Holocaust Museum, and not the place where the extermination of Native Americans or millions of African slaves is commemorated.

To some extent, therefore, the Holocaust is used retrospectively to justify contemporary political actualities. Routinely, a connection is made by critics between the history of Jewish suffering and the triumph of the American Jewish community, or between the Holocaust and Israel, one leading to and vindicating the other. And certainly there has been enough history uncovered to show that the mainstream Zionist movement was at times less interested in saving the whole Jewish people from elimination than in rescuing some for settlement in Palestine; by the same token, right-wing Zionists (e.g. Shamir) during the Nazi period did contact the Germans for support and help.

All in all, though, the sheer enormity of what took place between 1933 and 1945 beggars our powers of description and understanding. The more one studies this period and its excesses, the more one must conclude that, for any decent human being, the slaughter of so many millions of innocents must, and indeed should weigh heavily on subsequent generations, Jewish and non-Jewish. However much we may concur, say, with Tom Segev in his book *The Seventh Million*, that Israel exploited the Holocaust for political purposes, there can be little doubt that the tragedy's collective memory and the burden of fear it places on all Jews today is not to be minimised: yes, there were other collective massacres in human history (Native Americans, Armenians, Bosnians, Kurds, etc.); and yes, some were neither sufficiently acknowledged by the perpetrators nor adequately compensated, but there is no reason at all, in my opinion, not to submit oneself in horror and awe to the special tragedy besetting the Jewish people. As an Arab, in particular, I find it important to comprehend this collective experience in as much of its terrible concrete detail as one is capable: this act of comprehension guarantees one's humanity and resolve that such a catastrophe should never be forgotten and never again recur.

Such a view of Jewish suffering was afforded Arab commentators during the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Israel early in the 1960s, when the trial was used by Israel to lay out the full horrors of Nazi genocide. Right-wing Lebanese Phalangist commentators claimed that the whole business was baseless propaganda, but elsewhere in the Arab press of the time (in Egypt and in the mainstream Lebanese press) the Eichmann affair was reported with due consideration given to the appalling events in wartime Germany.

Yet, according to a study of the period by Dr Osama Makdisi, a young Lebanese historian at Rice University in Houston, Texas, Arab reports of the trial concluded that, although what was done to the Jews in Germany was indeed a crime against humanity, Israel's crime of dispossessing and expelling an entire people constituted no less a crime of the same kind. Dr Makdisi discovered that there was no attempt to equate the Holocaust with the Palestinian catastrophe, only that, judged by the same standards, Israel and Germany were both guilty of heinous crimes of enormous magnitude.

My own feeling is that perhaps the Eichmann trial was useful to the Arab side during the psychological battles of the 1960s as a way of exposing Israeli callousness to the Arabs, and not especially as an attempt to acquaint Arab readers with details of the Jewish experience.

I have mentioned all this in an article on coexistence because it underlines the historical irony of the present impasse, which perhaps only Arabs and Jews in the Diaspora are capable of fully appreciating and, in a sense, transcending. There is now no real peace, as all but the most stubborn and naive observers will concede. As I said in my last article, Israel's recent behaviour, as embodied in Binyamin Netanyahu's erratic but regular unprovoked brutality, stretches in a continuum from the country's earliest days, in which contempt, the deployment of raw power and systematic brutalisation of the Palestinians constituted the central premise. On the other hand, this lamentable policy does not in any way justify the retrospective attempts made by Israelis or Palestinians to use the Holocaust to justify Israeli cruelty or to dismiss the Holocaust as totally irrelevant or even implausible. Cynicism does not help; as Oscar Wilde once said, a cynic knows the price of everything but the value of nothing. We can be as impatient with Israeli posturing about psychological security as with recent Arab efforts to enlist people like the degraded Roger Garaudy in order to cast doubt on the six million victims. Neither advances the cause of peace, or of real coexistence between the peoples whose share of historical sufferings links them inextricably.

Yet except for a few Jewish intellectuals here and there — for example, the American Rabbi Marc Ellis, or Professor Israel Shahak — reflections on the desolate history of anti-Semitism and Jewish solitude by Jewish thinkers today has been inadequate. For there is a link to be made between what happened to Jews in World War II and the catastrophe of the Palestinian people, but it cannot be made only rhetorically, or as an argument to demolish or diminish the true content of both the Holocaust and 1948. Neither is equal to the other; similarly, neither one nor the other excuses present violence; and finally, neither one nor the other must be minimised. There is suffering and injustice enough for everyone. But unless the connection is made by which the Jewish tragedy is seen to have led directly to the Palestinian catastrophe by, let us call it necessity (rather than pure will) we cannot coexist as two communities of detached and uncommunicatingly separate suffering. It has been the failing of Oslo to plan in terms of separation, a clinical partition of peoples into individual, but unequal, entities, rather than to grasp that the only way of rising beyond the endless back-and-forth violence and dehumanisation is to admit the universality and integrity of the other's experience, and to begin to plan a common life together.

I cannot see any way at all of (a) not imagining the Jews of Israel as, in decisive measure, really the permanent result of the Holocaust, and (b) not also requiring from them acknowledgement of what they did to the Palestinians during and after 1948. This means that, as Palestinians, we demand consideration and reparations from them without in any way minimising their own history of suffering and genocide. This is the only mutual recognition worth having, and the fact that present governments and leaders are incapable of such gestures testifies to the poverty of spirit and imagination that afflicts us all. This is where Jews and Palestinians outside of historical Palestine can play a constructive role that is impossible for those inside, who live under the daily pressure of occupation and dialectical confrontation. The dialogue has to be on the level I have been discussing here, and not on debased questions of political strategy and tactics. When one considers the broad lines of Jewish philosophy, from Buber to Levinas, and perceives in it an almost total absence of reflection on the Palestinian issue, one realises how far one has to go. What is desired, therefore, is a notion of coexistence that is true to the differences between Jew and Palestinian, but true also to the common history of different struggle and unequal survival that links them.

There can be no higher ethical and moral imperative than discussions and dialogues about that. We must accept the Jewish experience in all that it entails of horror and fear; but we must require that our experience be given no less attention, or perhaps another plane of historical actuality. Who would want morally to equate mass extermination with mass dispossession? It would be foolish even to try. But they are connected — a different thing altogether — in the struggle over Palestine which has been so intransigent, its elements so irreconcilable. I know that, at a time when Palestinian land is still being taken, when our houses are demolished, when our daily existence is still subject to the humiliations and captivity imposed on us by Israel and its many supporters in Europe and especially the United States, to speak of prior Jewish agonies will seem like a kind of impertinence. I do not accept the notion that by taking our land Zionism redeemed the history of the Jews, and I cannot ever be made to acquiesce in the need to dispossess the whole Palestinian people. But I can admit the notion that the distortions of the Holocaust created distortions in its victims, which are replicated today in the victims of Zionism itself, that is, the Palestinians. Understanding what happened to the Jews in Europe under the Nazis means understanding what is universal about a human experience under calamitous conditions. It means compassion, human sympathy, and utter recoil from the notion of killing people for ethnic, religious, or nationalist reasons.

I attach no conditions to such comprehension and compassion: one feels them for their own sake, not for political advantage. Yet such an advance in consciousness by Arabs ought to be met by an equal willingness for compassion and comprehension on the part of Israelis and Israel's supporters, who have engaged in all sorts of denial and expressions of defensive non-responsibility when it comes to Israel's central role on our historical dispossession as a people. This is disgraceful. And it is just unacceptable simply to say (as do many Zionist liberals) that we should forget the past and go on to two separate states. This is as insulting to Jewish memories of the Holocaust as it is to Palestinians who continue to be dispossessed at Israel's hands. The simple fact is that Jewish and Palestinian experiences are historically, indeed organically, connected: to break them asunder is to falsify what is authentic about each. We must think our histories together, however difficult that may be, in order for there to be a common future. And that future must include Arabs and Jews together, free of any exclusionary, denial-based schemes for shutting out one side by the other, either theoretically or politically. That is the real challenge. The rest is much easier.

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah — Boycott, not mere rejection

Is "contact" with one or more Israelis tantamount to breaching the popular consensus in Egypt against normalisation of relations with the Israeli state? Without much hesitation, I would say that it really depends on the nature of both the "contact" and the "contacted". Such an answer, however, would seem to run counter to the assertions of many anti-normalisation protagonists, expressed in the resolutions of civic bodies such as the Press Syndicate, or in the on-going debate on normalisation, which became especially heated and rancorous following the meeting in Copenhagen last February, where Arab and Israeli "intellectuals" established an International Alliance for Arab-Israeli Peace.

In much of the debate, the elements of an anti-normalisation position are taken as self-evident, involving a blanket ban on anything Israeli. But, irrespective for the moment of whether such a blanket ban is desirable, is it practicable? Does it involve, for instance, Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, so-called "Arab Israelis", who constitute some 20 per cent of all Israelis? Does it cover encounters with Israeli participants in international forums? What, for that matter, does a rejection of "cultural normalisation" involve? It cannot, I am sure, mean that we are not to read books or articles written by Israelis, which is patently absurd; but what of translating, quoting or publishing such books and articles? Does the ban on travel to Israel include Palestinian self-rule areas in Gaza and the West Bank, which remain, for all practical purposes, firmly under Israeli occupation?

I have deliberately chosen some of the more obvious "grey" areas in the anti-normalisation stance because they reveal most starkly that a blanket ban is practicable only in the breaching.

In fact, we have a situation where the anti-normalisation position is being applied in accordance with two standards, the first self-evident, sweeping and inflexible, and the second, more flexible and practicable, but tacit and rarely expressed. Application, then, takes on a discretionary character — certain "contacts" are not spoken of, are implicitly accepted or "forgiven", while others are vociferously damned. But since the criterion being applied is *discretionary*, there is no guaranteeing that it is not also, at least on occasion, arbitrary and subjective.

More serious, however, is the fact that the discrepancy between the two sets of standards undermines the credibility of an anti-normalisation position, weakens its mobilising ability and, most important of all, maintains it at a very low level of development. More sentiment than policy, the popular consensus on resisting normalisation continues to adopt an overwhelmingly defensive posture which is expressed basically in negative terms: what not to do, rather than what needs to be done. This may have been understandable in the late '70s, when the Egyptian intelligentsia found itself not only at odds with Sadat, but with the people, who, while not actively supporting the late president's policies, were so exhausted by war and poverty that they were willing to believe that his fervent ("strategic") drive towards the US, and then Israel, would usher in a new age of peace and prosperity.

But to maintain such an attitude 20 years later is unjustifiable. And make no mistake: there *is* today in Egypt a popular consensus against the normalisation of relations with Israel. Some writers dispute this, usually citing the fairly substantial amount of business that is being done between Egypt and Israel, both on the government agency level and between private firms. But the word "popular" is used here judiciously, and it so happens that those sections of Egyptian society that are engaged in "heavy" dealings with Israeli counterparts are a tiny minority of the population. As for the rest, we have the fact that all the country's unions, both white- and blue-collar, have come out strongly against normalisation, as have the bulk of civic associations and groupings in such diverse areas as human, women's and labour rights, community development, the environment, etc. The bulk of the country's literati, artists, novelists, theatre and cinema makers, both individually and in organised groups, have also expressed their opposition to normalisation.

But here is a paradox. A position which enjoys a massive base of support among the people remains extremely weak and defensive, shrouded in vagueness and mired in a propensity to high-sounding rhetoric and a negativist, self-protective inclination. There are many reasons for this, not least the overall weakness of political space in Egypt in general. This is no excuse for complacency, however, since it begs the question of whether the general weakness of Egyptian political space is not, in turn, an expression of the weakness of its component parts.

I have noted in previous articles that rejection of normalisation, for all its weaknesses, remains the Egyptian people's single most important mode of expression of their solidarity with the Palestinian people and opposition to Israel's imperial hooliganism in the region. It is time that it was developed. And to do so, we need to be as ruthless in exposing the weaknesses of this stance as those who would have us throw out the baby with the bath water.

Let us by all means turn our backs on a feeble and negatively-expressed "rejection of normalisation", but, insofar as we believe in the justice of the Palestinian and Arab cause, let us do so in favour of a positive, genuinely popular and increasingly effective *boycott* of Israel.

Footsteps in the dark

David Blake is lost in a mist



Ahmed Fahmy

Concert of orchestral music by Mozart, Bach and modern Egyptian music; conductor Rageh Daoud; Al-Hanager; 27 October

This was a concert of varied interests. Why give such concerts at Al-Hanager? It is the entrails of the whale without Jonah, but with the unfortunate musicians coping with its peculiarities. The Hall forms a membraneous envelope which completely restricts and distorts the sound. The capsule Hanager is no friend to musical sounds — from baroque to pop what we get is a strange semi-digested veil of faraway noise related to nothing.

The orchestra, conducted by Rageh Daoud, began with a Mozart Divertimento KV 136. The sound began as it would continue for the entire concert — mist-wrapped, not Mozart "jolie" but Mozart invisible. The first movement tried to shine under the conductor's beat, but came from the other side of a veil. Nothing was direct. Then the andante, which should have been pretty, but was merely vapid. Maybe Daoud himself knows the sort of sound the hearers will be getting and so the last section of this piece became a race against the Hanager resident ghosts. A bit of gloss, but the ghosts won.

Then two Bach pieces: an air from the Suite No 3 in D major. This had edge to it and some incision. And the Bach again, the piano concerto in F minor with Yasser Mokhtar.

Mokhtar is young, known for his incisive, often erratic but exciting eccentric flights which always finish successfully. He is one of Cairo's shining players.

He came, he sat, he delivered — but what was it? As Bach it was bereft. Where was the Mokhtar we had expected? The sound was velvet wrapped, tentative, surface only, without one chord or sequence of an important, healthy Bach. It could not have been nicer if one's aunt had played it, but Bach was never nice, never superficial. The piano sound was dead beat. Again, where was Mokhtar? Maybe we were being handed the "authentic sound", but the sound of what? Hearing-aid piano music is bad enough, but heard as the slim-line sound that wavers up out of the Hanager gloom it is altogether too much. This concerto was not even "sons of Bach", let alone J.S. himself. Footsteps in the dark. No grandeur, no contact, no intimacy, merely rather feeble salon stuff. The three movements sped along without a trace of force or mood. Bye-bye Mokhtar and Hanager.

Another of the varied interests of this evening proved to be Abdel-Rahim's piece called *To the Arab Martyrs*, a doloroso piece. It began as a piano piece and was later arranged for orchestra by Khaled Shoukri. Whether your inclinations are for or against Abdel-Rahim, you will have to admit his professionalism in this lament. He knows what he is about. It is neither noisy nor brash, not one repeated effect or empty patch. It is a brief thing in two sections.

Abdel-Rahim is well into the 20th century — the modulations and polyphonic slide-ins and outs of keys and colours are almost too quick for the ear. The surface of each slide is a modulation of beauty, then a swoop and the ear follows yet another verse or step in this lively lament. Comes a change — a kind of shadow or mirage blows up. Magisterial and troublesome, it hangs aloft. Will there be an explosion? No, it moves off and the piece ends in space. Maybe it is Abdel-Rahim's most approachable composition for those of another persuasion. The orchestra found a voice. The veils of the Hanager were swept away and we had an interesting piece of music to contemplate.

Then the orchestra gave two andantes by two different composers, Ali Osman's *North and South* and Ahmed Abdallah's *Cairo 1950*. They seemed to have nothing in common, all these andantes of the evening. The 1950 one was interesting. Much was going on musically. This dating suggested history. The other, *North and South*, seemed to leave the doors wide open. Which North? Whose South? Troubles were to come. These andantes might become furioso, but we were not allowed to know.

Mona Ghoneim gave *El-Mashrabiya*, in three sections or moods — quiet, slow, and very quick. She is an individual composer and it is most important that she be heard because her writing is not easy. It is full of shocks, with some pleasures, but is of a dark timbre and vision. The Cairo Symphony has played once some of her passions, primitive and frightening. This Mashrabiya suggested troubles, but they never came out into the open. It was her art that dissembled, not the peculiar acoustics of the Hanager.

Rageh Daoud ended the concert as composer. Four dances of varying tempo. By this time the orchestra's sound was brightening. Daoud's melodies and pace are visual. Inas Abdel-Dayem as flautist put the musical mish-mash tones of the Hanager far out into the streets beyond. We really saw and heard her dancing and Daoud's notes won the night.

Schubert Bicentenary Memorial Concert; Cairo Opera Orchestra; conductor Sherif Mohie El-Din; solo violin Ahmed Fahmy; Small Hall, Cairo Opera House; 31 October

Schubert is beyond criticism, beyond everything. Angel, angel. Even Stravinsky thought he was an angel. But if he is an angel, he took a lot of strange baggage to heaven. Questions could have been asked by those in authority up there. But Schubert was Schubert. Only they could have offered him the talents he had. They called him up pretty quickly. He left 998 compositions, begun at the age of 15. He died aged 31. All the rest of it, dates, compositions, feats of daring and musical achievement are beyond rational belief. Angel he was. There is no life without being able to listen to Schubert. To be starved of him is a form of death.

This concert, a matinée, is one of a new series called Music for All and is the brain child of Sherif Mohie El-Din. This afternoon's concert filled the Small Hall. It was a memorial occasion for Schubert's birth year of 1797.

Schubert was a songster of immortal gifts. He sang of everything: girls, birds, living life, devils and death, always death. He was in a hurry. He lived in no place and wrote of every place. His work schedule was terrifying. He could begin a symphony at four in the morning and finish it by five at night, and plan to be dead next day. He had no idea of time or money. They say he never wrote a successful opera. He wrote dozens of micro-mini-operas which were his songs. The leitmotif of his music is wandering, separation, alienation. The rhythm of everything he wrote calls up the footprint of destiny to haunt the listener. If not today, tomorrow.

The music chosen for this concert was Schubert in more relaxed and cheerful mood. But one must take care even here. The enveloping shadow is in wait.

The Symphony No 5 in B flat minor begins light and feathery, always, however, in descending scales which soar up in rhythmic beats like birds in flight — very original and unlike any other symphonic writing. Schubert, in spite of his closeness to Beethoven, always looked to change, wandering off-centre.

From the beginning of the concert the Cairo Opera Orchestra gave show of its new and changed face. Mohie El-Din encouraged it in forceful but light dancing rhythms. The No 5 has little of Schubert's melancholy. Never still, it wanders, cheerful, before cutting lashes of turbulent unease swamp everything.

Ahmed Fahmy, the solo violinist, gave a dashing display in the three movement *Rondo for violin and string orchestra*. It has virtuoso fireworks. The tone of this player was very suitable to the atmosphere of the symphony: the violin was blond and blue to the tawny russet from the orchestra.

Last came the Symphony No 4 in a flood of movements. Schubert opens it with thunderclaps and bass drums, then alternates it with hopeless, dreamy sighs, then back again, down into the deep blues. Once up again and then down forever. This symphony is one of Schubert's long wanderings, but the orchestra never became footsore or flagged. Their energy was undimmed to the end.

Where has the listener been in all this music, opulent but never erotic, walking, trudging, never resting?

Theatre

A mad world, my masters

Nehad Selaiha joins the Movement Company on a roller-coaster jaunt through recent history

If you love clowns, the circus, carnivals, pantomime, street and fairground shows and the old silent movies, you will give yourself a treat if you make your way to Al-Hanager and join the Movement Company in their latest and craziest theatrical venture, ironically christened *The Birth*. You should be warned, however, that the performance lasts for over three and a half hours, plus a ten-minute interval between its two parts. But then, you do not have to watch it all the same evening; like a revue or a circus programme, it is made up of self-contained units that can be enjoyed separately, and the general atmosphere is so relaxed and informal you can easily stroll in and out, or leave in the interval and come back on another evening to enjoy the second part of the entertainment. But having said that, I must hasten to add that on the two occasions I watched *The Birth* the audience were quite happy to sit through the whole performance, maintaining throughout a lively and noisy rapport with the actors. Some, it was obvious from their irritating habit of giving away the punch lines by beating the actors to them, had seen the show before and come back bringing along friends and relatives.

The Birth is built as a "musical comedy", but it hardly fits the bill. Musical comedy invariably has a degree, however minimal, of narrative coherence and dramatic focus. What *The Birth* offers, on the other hand, is a sprawling, non-linear, motley conglomeration of stock situations and characters, familiar comic routines, and popular songs. This hackneyed stuff, however, is recast in the mould of parody and burlesque (which marks the highly self-conscious style of the performance) and recharged with an anarchic energy that defuses all slogans, undercuts and debunks most values and ends up affirming nothing but the joy of making theatre.

The satirical reading of modern Egyptian history and reality offered in *The Birth* (which turns out to be a series of miscarriages) concentrates on the plight of the young and enlightened and is projected from their point of view. Beleaguered by military dictatorship, political chicanery, a stultified, authoritarian educational system, poverty, unemployment, corruption, cultural and ethical confusion, a crumbling ethos and the spread of bigotry, hypocrisy and fanaticism, they can hardly be expected to take a cool, objective, analytical view of their situation. What we get from author and director Khaled El-Sawi in this production is not an integrated critique of modern Egyptian reality in all its complexity, but, rather, a Brechtian kind of totalitarian dichotomy that leaves no third space where one can elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the "other" of oneself. From the very initial scene, which parodies the opening scene of Ionesco's *Jacques, Ou la Soumission* (itself a parody of bourgeois conformity), and right through all the sketches and interludes, the characters are clearly and uncompromisingly divided, in black and white terms, into oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited, rich and poor, etc. Such black and white polarity puts paid to any attempt at complex characterisation and can only produce stereotypes or flat cardboard cut-outs.

The Birth, however, deftly avoids this and the whole issue of characterisation, and, in a most un-Brechtian move, subverts and discredits the very simplistic dichotomy it proposes by revealing it, through self-parody, as preposterously naive and melodramatic. Moreover, the actors' constant trafficking in both good and evil parts and their swift, and sometimes disconcertingly abrupt, alternation from one extreme to the other make a travesty of this dichotomy and expose it as a mere theatrical convention rooted in melodrama.

If one has to chart the genealogy of this slick, yet delightfully splintered and rambling show, one will not find it in Brecht's epic theatre, in the political agit-prop, nor in any of the popular forms of artistic entertainment it harnesses both as material and structural devices. It relates more convincingly to the type of cynical, satirical musical show developed by Samir El-Asfouri in his unforgettable *Honey is Honey and Onions are Onions* on the model of the continental political cabaret that flourished earlier this century and featured parodies, grotesques, satirical chansons and folk songs. Indeed, at one point El-Sawi deliberately evokes El-Asfouri's model by including one of its famous songs in a direct gesture of acknowledgment. In other respects, too — the free spirited use of borrowed material, the parodistic approach to the cultural tradition, the off-hand casualness of the dialogue, the campy sense of performance, and the seamless movement between observational and surreal humour — the two works are similar and seem to share a post-modern approach to art that has been dubbed by Bonnie Marranca "the Ridiculous aesthetic".

In theatre, the Ridiculous, which evolved informally as a definable sensibility in the mid-sixties without manifestoes or official theories, can be described, in Marranca's words as "an anarchic undermining of political, sexual, psychological and cultural categories, frequently in dramatic structures that parody classical literary forms or re-function American popular entertainments and always allude to themselves as 'performances'." It "tends toward camp, kitsch, transvestism, the grotesque, flamboyant visuals and literary dandyism". Compared to the Absurd, it is less intellectual, more earthy, primal and liberated, and its dependency on the icons, artifacts and entertainments of mass culture — the stars, old movies, popular songs, television and advertising — make of it a truly indigenous American approach to making theatre.

Many of those who have seen El-Asfouri's *Honey* and El-Sawi's *Birth* will concede that elements of the Ridiculous, as defined by Marranca, can be traced, in a modified form, in both works. This implies not so much direct influence (I do not know if either El-Asfouri or El-Sawi is familiar with the work of the artists grouped by Marranca under the rubric Theatre of the Ridiculous) as a coincidence of artistic response to the challenges and stresses of certain historical moments.

But whatever its artistic provenance, *The Birth* is wonderful theatre and great fun. Once you surrender to it, you will perceive under the seeming formlessness subtle correspondences and thematic and formal links that hold it together; and though long by Al-Hanager standards, it moves at such a galloping pace that you hardly feel the time. Indeed, at the end of the performance, when the actors tumble off the stage, having given up all pretensions to being anything else but gaily dressed clowns, and entice us into a communal farewell dance that takes us out of the auditorium (which, together with the stage, is dressed to look like a fairground marquee or a circus tent), one feels a pang, a sense of desolation. For me, the most compelling and enthralling aspect of *The Birth*, and its major source of power and fascination, is the brilliant ensemble acting of the talented and committed young cast. They played a wide range of roles, including cross-gender and animal parts, with joy, zest and panache, giving the Al-Hanager clientele the best ensemble acting they have ever seen at this venue. And given the state of Al-Hanger today, you may never see such an ensemble of fine actors all the time.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Youth Salon
Centre of Arts, 1, Maahad El-Swissri, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri. 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm.

Wafiq Madbouli Ayad
Exhibition Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Galaa St. Boulaq. Tel 5786100. Daily 9am-10pm.

Maja Soric (Paintings)
Sheba Gallery, 6 Sri Lanka St (Yehia Ibrahim St), Apt 1, Zamalek. Tel 340 9192. Daily exc Sun, 10am-8pm. Until 8 Nov.

Sarwat El-Bahr & Mounir Canaan (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montazah, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 9 Nov.

Group Show
Shomou' Gallery, no 12, Street 150, Maadi. Daily exc Fri, 10am-7pm. Until 10 Nov.
Works by Ahmed Fayed, Nabih Ismael, Gad Salama Gad and Hoda Abdel-Rahman.

Essam Sedqi El-Gabakhnagui (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 13 Nov.

Heinrich Böll: His Life and Works (Documents)
Goethe Institute, language studies department, 14 Hussein Wassef St, Missaha Sq, Dokki. Tel 348 4500. Until 13 Nov.

Omar El-Fayoumi (Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 14 Nov.

Anna Orphanou Galyás (Paintings)
Spiro Arts Gallery, 6 Rd 77c, Golf Area, Maadi. Tel 351 4362. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 14 Nov.

Egyptian Features
Zeinab Khatoun House, behind El-Azhar Mosque. Tel 340 2287. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 15 Nov.
Black and white photographs from the collection of Elwi Farid.

Hassan Aziz Hassan (Paintings) & **Massimo Baistrocchi** (Graphic Designs)
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily exc Fri & Sat. Until 19 Nov.

Dimitri Papadimos
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5422. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 20 Nov.
Sixty-eight black and white photographs showing the village built by Hassan Fathy.

Albrecht Dürer
Gallery of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Zamalek, c/o Goethe Institute, tel 575 9877. Until 25 No.
Fifty-six reproductions of woodworks.

Massimo Baistrocchi

The Eighth AUC Student Art Exhibition
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo. Tel 357 6373. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 26 Nov.

Ihab Shaker (Paintings)
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-9pm. Until 29 Nov.

Jerry Zeniuk (Paintings)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Opening 11 Nov, 7pm. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 29 Nov.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.

FILMS

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
8 Nov, 6pm: **Giorni D'Amore**, directed by De Santis and starring Marcello Mastroianni.
9 Nov, 6pm: **Italiani Brava Gente** (1964), directed by De Santis.

French Films
French Cultural Institute, Heliopolis annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824.
6 Nov, 7pm: **Van Gogh**, directed by Maurice Pialat.
10 Nov, 7pm: **Sans Toit Ni Loi**, (1985) Directed by Agnès Varda.

German Films
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St (ex Bustan St), Downtown. Tel 575 9877.
10 Nov, 6.30pm: **The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum** (1975) directed by Volker Schlondorff.
11 Nov, 6.30pm: **House Without Guard** (1975) directed by Rainer Wolffhardt.

Japanese Film Festival
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. Tel 354 9431. All films start at 6pm.
6 Nov: **My Sons**, directed by Yoji Yamada.
9 Nov: **Early Summer**, directed by Ozu Yasujiro.
10 Nov: **A Married Life**, directed by Naruse Mikio.
11 Nov: **Doomed (To Live)**, directed by Kurosawa Akira.
12 Nov: **The Life of Oharu**, directed by Mizoguchi Kenji.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Batman And Robin
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 591 6095. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Arnold Schwarzenegger, George Clooney, Chris O'Donnell, Uma Thurman and Alicia Silverstone.

Speed 2
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm; Thur-Sat midnight show. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Sandra Bullock and Jason Patrick.

Father's Day
MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
With Robin Williams, Nastassia Kinski and Billy Chrystal.

Terminal Velocity
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Charley Sheen and Nastassia Kinski.

Volcano
Odeon II, Abdel-Hamid Said St., Downtown. Tel 575 8797.
With Tommy Lee Jones.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon I, Abdel-Hamid Said St., Downtown. Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 1am, 3pm, 6.pm & 9.pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.
With Hanan Tork, Khaled El-Nabawi, Mohamed Heneidi and Mohamed Fouad.

Hanheb We Ne'eb (We'll Love and Rise Above)
Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 1am, 3pm, 6.pm & 9pm. Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Farouq El-Fishawi.

Afreet El-Nahar (Daytime Demons)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Nour El-Sherif and Elham Shahin.

El-Masir (Le Destin)
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon III, Abdel-Hamid Said St., Downtown. Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Nour El-Sherif, Leila Elwi, Mahmoud Hemeida and Safeiya El-Emari.

MUSIC

Arab Music Festival
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926 & Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya sq, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. Until 10 Nov. For details, contact the venues.

A Panorama of Modern Egyptian Music
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 8 Nov, 8pm.
Works by Gamal Abdel-Rehim, Ragueh Dawoud, Mona Ghoneim, Sherif Mohieddin and Mohamed Abdel-Fattah.

Children's Concert II
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 9 Nov, 11pm.
The Cairo Symphony Orchestra performs Saint-Saens's Carnival of the Animals and Pordie's Archibald's Adventure.

Chamber Music Concert
Ewart Hall, AUC, as above. 12 Nov, 8pm.

THEATRE

El-Milad (The Birth)
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 6.30pm. Until 31 Oct.
Scripted and directed by Khaled El-Sawi and performed by El-Haraka El-Masraheiya Troupe.

Bahlool Fi Istambul
Hilton Ramsis Theatre, Hilton Ramsis annex, El-Galaa St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm; Fri, 8.30pm
With Samir Ghanem, Elham Shahin and Bothayna Rashwan.

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Sat & Sun 10pm; Mon 8pm.
Starring and directed by Mohamed Sobhi.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Weds & Thurs, 10pm; Fri 8pm.
Directed by Mohamed Sobhi.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
With Adel Imam; directed by Sherif Arafa.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
With Mahmoud El-Guindi, Salah El-Saadani, Samah Anwar and Ashraf Abdel-Baqi; directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Cromb, Zabadi (Cabbage, Yogurt)
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10pm; Mon & Fri, 8pm
Said Saleh, Ahmed Bedeir and Nagwa Fouad, directed by Essam El-Sayed.

Tarnima II (Hymn II)
El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 937 948. Daily 10pm.
Directed by Entessar Abdel-Fattah.

Leila Foll (Jasmine Night)
Floating Theatre, Adjacent to University Bridge, Manial. Tel 364 9516. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.
Mahmoud El-Alfi directs Ola Rami, Emad Rashad, Mohamed Farid and Ahmed Ibrahim.

Senouhi
National, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 9.30pm.
Scripted by Ahmed Fouad Selim and directed by Teymour Abeshedzi.

El-Qa'eda Wal Estethna' (The Rule and the Exception)
El-Zorqani Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 8.30pm.
With Mohamed Anani and Hamada Abdel-Halim, directed by Mamdouh Aql.

Alabanda
El-Fardos Theatre, El-Beohth Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 9.30pm.
With Lucy, Sherif Mounir, Mona Abdel-Ghani, Mohamed Heneidi and Alaa Waleyeddin; directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Ayam El-Insan El-Sab'a (The Seven Days of Man)
El-Ghouri Palace, El-Azhar, El-Hossein. Tel 511 0472. Daily 10pm.
Directed by Nasser Abdel-Moneim.

LECTURES

The Appearance of Prophet Mohamed in the Sirat Antar
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 6 Nov, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Dr Urbain Vermeulen from the Catholic University of Leuven.

Women in Plato's Work
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 6 Nov, 6pm.
Lecture by Dr Mostafa El-Nashaar and Dr Mounira Karawan, followed by a screening of De Mille's *Cleopatra*.

What New Technologies for the Preservation of the Heritage?
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 6 Nov, 7pm.
Lecture by Professor Taha Abdalla.

The Hope Village: A Programme for Egypt's Homeless Street Children
Cairo American College, Road 253 and Road 213, Maadi. 10 Nov, 7pm.

The Later Bahi Mamluks (1310-1382)
American Research Centre, 2 Simon Bolivar Sq, Garden City. Tel 354 8239. 10 Nov, 5pm.
Lecture by William Lyster.

On the So-Called "Mirror of Princes" Literature
French Cultural Institute, as above. 11 Nov, 7pm.
Lecture by Abdalla Sheikh Moussa.

Gourna: The End of A Symbiotic Relationship
Blue Room, Greek Campus, American University in Cairo. Tel 357 5436. 12 Nov, 6pm.
Lecture by Caroline Simpson.

The Egyptian Collections of the Municipal Archaeological Museum in Milano
Italian Cultural Institute, as above. 12 Nov, 6pm.
Lecture with slides by Dr Francesco Tiradritti.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo.
Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries



Maged Beshara

PASTEL paintings by a number of artists are on show at Picasso Gallery in Zamalek. The works on exhibit illustrate well the formal and expressive potential of the medium. Worth noting are the scenes from the oases by Maged Beshara and Abu Bakr El-Nawawi, which focus on the interplay between architectural masses and light. Also noteworthy are the cityscapes which explore the dynamic between buildings and people by Farid Fadel and Mamdouh Ammar.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**


photo: Sherif Sonbol

NOTES FROM THE PAST: The celebrated Lebanese singer Magda El-Rumi, together with Mustafa Nagui, rehearsing for the Arabic Music Festival which ends on the 10 November. In addition to performances, the festival, which currently occupies both the Small Hall at the Opera House and the Gomhouria Theatre, includes lectures on the formal and historical dimensions of classical song and, on the fringe, an exhibition of Arabic calligraphy in the Opera House Gallery.

Packaging the label

***Hala Halim** speaks to Ibrahim Mansour, a moving spirit in the project to produce a documentary film on the "generation of the '60s"*

There is something positively dynastic about the literary scene in Egypt: if you are a writer, then above all other classifications you get lumped in a particular *decade* —you are a '60s playwright, a '70s poet, an '80s novelist or a '90s poet. And to each generation its accoutrements: the journals, the cafés, the lingua. Yet, beneath the apparently insatiable desire to locate writers in neatly spaced, decade long compartments lies a morass of ambiguities.

To start with, the decade criterion at times denotes the age-group to which a writer belongs, while at others serves as an indicator of the time when his or her work first came to be noticed. And while some use such generational labels to imply, if not a school, then at least shared aesthetic features in the writings of a given group, to others such labelling places the accent on the political climate and events that shaped the sensibility of writers.

The team currently working on a documentary video film on the writers, artists and filmmakers of the '60s is, happily, aware of the potential pitfalls of such classifications. Co-produced by Ossama Fawzi and Magdi Youssef, the film is directed by Radwan El-Kashef, Daoud Abdel-Sayed and Mohamed El-Qalyubi. Compiling the material, offering commentary and conducting interviews is writer and translator Ibrahim Mansour, considered a quintessentially '60s figure.

The initial impetus for the project came after Ossama Fawzi had watched a film by novelist Gamil Attiya on a fellow fiction-writer, Bahaa Taher. "To people like us who reached maturity in the '60s," explains Magdi Youssef, "Ibrahim Mansour, Gamil Attiya and others were exemplary models. Their politics were not establishment — particularly as seen in [the magazine] *Gallerie '68*. And many people from that time have died: Amal Donqol, Yehia El-Taher Abdullah, Abdel-Hakim Qassem... there is a need for testimonies and documentation." He adds that there will be two versions of the film which will be shown on satellite channels: one for Western viewers, one for Arabs.

On the term "the '60s generation", Mansour has this to say: "The confusion arises around the time-defined classification. Some of those who are referred to as the '60s group — like Edwar El-Kharrat and Soliman Fayyad — are people who had started writing before the '60s... And there are people like Mahmoud El-Wardani who considers himself '60s, because of his political sympathies, but who started writing much later."

The film, according to Mansour, "is about the expression 'the '60s'... it tries to answer the question 'what is the '60s?'; because the expression emerged only towards the end of the next decade and I believe it is a journalistic expression... There are people who behave as if the '60s is a foreign country: you need a visa to get in; you need citizenship to belong. In the film we pose questions about the '60s, record the various definitions and leave it to the viewers to reach their own conclusions".

Mansour, just as he rejects the generational label, would be loath to accept that '60s writers and artists constitute a school, given that "they were not a homogeneous group — there were the realists, there were the surrealists, there were all sorts of different artistic and literary schools". Instead, he believes that the most appropriate description of "'the '60s' is as an artistic or cultural *trend*, because it was not restricted to literature — there was cinema, the plastic arts, theatre: it was a general movement." Seeing that in the '60s, according to Mansour, the writers and artists "used to spend more time together than they did with their families, at Café Riche, and at Isaïevich Café, there was an interaction, an interplay between the various arts."

Would Mansour, then, be willing to concede any over-arching, shared features in the works of '60s writers and artists? "There *were* common features", he says, "for example... well, essentially, the rejection of black and white. It was one of the cardinal changes in their vision." Another cardinal feature shared by the group, explains Mansour "is that the vast majority did not have access to Western culture, except through translation — in contrast to the previous generation who were university graduates, spoke foreign languages, read European literature which had a vast influence on them — be it social realist literature or otherwise. People like Yehia El-Taher Abdullah or Amal Donqol had no link to that. You could say there were the beginnings of a crystallisation of a literature with national features."

Among the examples Mansour cites is Abdel-Hakim Qassim's novel *Ayyam Al-Insan Al-Sab'a* (The Seven Days of Man). "No one before Abdel-Hakim Qassim wrote about the *mawaled* [saints' festivals]. His 'Seven Days of Man' was all about the *mawaled*, every step of the *mawaled* — before, during and after." Another dimension to the '60s formulation of national literature "was an interest in a particular narrative heritage which the previous generation looked down upon: the heritage of *Alf Leila Wa Leila* (The Thousand and One Nights), the popular epics and so on. Amal Donqol wrote a number of poems based on *Malhamat Al-Muhalhal*. Yehia El-Taher wrote *Hekayat lil-Amir Qabl an Yanam* (Bedtime Stories for the Prince) modelled on *Alf Leila*."

Would Mansour not agree that this 1960s rediscovery of a popular heritage, this delving in roots, also owes something, even if indirectly, to the general atmosphere of post-revolutionary patriotism and national pride?

"There is no doubt about that. Yes, the revolution *did* bring out a sense of pride in 'Egyptianness'", says Mansour, who adds that this dimension in the work of '60s writers "did not come out of nothing — it had its rudiments in the writings of the previous generation, but they were not distinct. What helped was that the '60s writers were totally severed from the direct influence of Western culture and civilisation, the model for previous generations."

There is, too, in Mansour's discourse a certain nostalgia for the spirit of collectivity of the '60s, for a time when there were big political issues and when there was team work. He speaks of *Gallerie '68*, the independent magazine, funded by public subscription and published in the wake of the June '67 defeat. "After the defeat, we felt that our very identity was under threat and that we were not responsible for what had happened. And there was a sense that the magazine was a testimony to the fact that we were still capable of doing something. That's why *Gallerie '68*, though there was nothing political in it, was seen as a political statement in other Arab countries."

Mansour sees, in the enthusiasm from all quarters and artists of different hues that surrounded the preparation for the magazine and its launching, "the impact of the dominant circumstances and conditions of the time. Artists donated paintings for a fund-raising exhibition for the magazine, so no-one can say he made the magazine because everyone participated in producing it". He rattles off a long list of writers who offered donations and support for the project: "Naguib Mahfouz, for example, paid over 200 pounds, of his own accord... Mohamed Ouda and Lutfi Waked too... None of us expected this huge response... I remember Mohamed Sidqi, who represented a trend we rejected, published a full-page interview with us [the editors] in *El-Gomhuria*, and this was even before the magazine was launched."

> *"There used to be these gatherings of 35 people or more who would sit and swear about this or that aspect of the magazine, but none of it was ever personal. That kind of settling of scores or vested interests was hardly present — now of course it's very much part of the way things are"*

Mansour also makes a point about the spirit of debate at the time: "There used to be these gatherings of 35 people or more who would sit and swear about this or that aspect of the magazine, but none of it was ever personal. That kind of settling of scores or vested interests was hardly present — now of course it's very much part of the way things are."

As to the video film, it is to combine documentation and polemic, portraits of '60s writers and debate on cultural-generational issues. Profiling the writers and artists against the background of their birthplace or the settings of their works, as the team intend, is a formidable logistic task. It will take them from novelist Edwar El-Kharrat's Alexandria to El-Abnoudi's Upper Egyptian village, from Soliman Fayyad's Mansoura to Lake Manzala, the setting of so much of Mohamed El-Bisatie's fiction. In some instances, it will be a question not so much of revisiting sites as recreating them.

Mansour enthuses about "the Agouza flat... which is from a forgotten period, the early '60s. The group of the Agouza flat included Tarek El-Bishri, Adli Rizkallah, Ezzeddin Naguib, Makram Henein, Mohieddin El-Labbad... lots of people used to meet there and Sayed Khamis" — here he turns laughingly to the poet who is sitting with us, the interview having taken place at the Grillon Café — "used to foot all the bills because he was a tomato trader." Portraits of writers and artists who have died, says Mansour, can be done by incorporating *footage from documentaries or television interviews*.

Aiming at situating the '60s within the cultural context of today and gauging the extent of their influence, the film will include interviews with writers from subsequent generations. "We've already filmed a gathering attended by different generations — '70s, '80s and '90s", says Mansour. "It turned out that the '70s writers still had a connection with those of the '60s, as was the case with the '80s writers. It was the '90s writers who were totally dissociated. Whereas with the '60s group there was an interest in national issues — and there *were* national issues and there *was* a national project, now there are no national issues and there is great frustration. As Iman Mirsal [a young poet] said, we have no issues because there are no issues."

Asked how he sees the generational categorisation, critic Ibrahim Fathi says vehemently that "the classification is totally wrong. There is no such thing as a new [artistic] generation every 10 years. It's an idea borne of the specificity of literary life here. The new-comers try to assert themselves vis-à-vis a well-established old vanguard. The situation here is that writers do not live from their writing... writers try to achieve symbolic capital which works through the idea of generations presenting their own raison d'etre, their own legitimacy." Yet, despite his reservations about the generational classification, Fathi finds that "the idea of generations does apply to the '60s generation, which has an amazing specificity. It was a generation that made a break with what preceded it — redefined literature, the genres, literary techniques... It was the first generation to broach the definition of reality, because in the '60s there was reality as packaged by the media, with which they didn't identify. They neither belonged to the old Left nor to the old Right. Hence the attempts to redefine reality, particularly in the short-story genre... where we note an objective language, free of any pre-formulated categories... There was a search for new techniques for representation." The '60s generation, says Fathi, represented "a complete break with the past, it was as if they had descended from heaven".

Books

A space for dissent

Gallerie '68, issues from May 1968 to February '69. Cairo: Matbouat Al-Kitaba Al-Ukhra, 1997

In the summer of 1968, a year after the June '67 defeat, a group of young writers surprised the reading public with a new publication of unusual layout and size, published under the title *Gallerie '68*. Unlike most literary magazines of the time, it appeared in a rectangular format and was a modest 78 pages long. Almost 30 years later Matbouat Al-Kitaba Al-Ukhra have reprinted the first five issues of *Gallerie '68* in book form, resurrecting both the spirit of the times and the angry generation of the late sixties.

It took two or three years following the defeat of 1967 for those writers who subsequently came to be grouped as the generation of the sixties to find the voice that was to become uniquely theirs. And during this formative period they published in a number of different journals, most notably *Al-Magalla* magazine, edited by Yehia Haqqi, and the supplement of *Al-Massa'*, edited by Abdel-Fattah El-Gamal.

In many senses it was the June defeat that acted as midwife to the birth of this generation. And at a time when the entire media was under the firm control of the state, publishing only the authorised and often incredible, version of events, a group of young writers undertook an act that many considered absolute madness — the publication of a magazine that would serve as the forum for their own views.

The nucleus of this group of young writers, who would regularly gather at the now defunct Café Riche, were reacting against a series of events, culminating in the defeat of '67, that had seen their world turned suddenly on its head. But rather than content themselves with tut-tutting over their coffees, they decided to pit themselves against all the obstacles that were placed in the path of the publication of independent newspapers and periodicals. In a sense, they were breaking the shackles of guardianship and liberating a certain space which they could call their own.

Nor were the writers alone in their rebellion. Some months before, and for the first time in 15 years, large numbers of demonstrators had taken to the streets to protest the lenient sentences handed down in the trials of the air force command. It was against this backdrop that the group of young writers began to solicit donations for their new publication, from their peers but also from older writers. Naguib Mahfouz offered the then very substantial sum of LE 200. A large exhibition of paintings was also held and the artists donated the proceeds from the sale of their paintings to the magazine.

The first issue of *Gallerie '68* carries on its masthead the name of artist Ahmed Mursi as editor-in-chief and artist Hassan Suleiman as artistic director; *the editorial board included Ibrahim Mansour*, Edwar El-Kharrat, Sayed Hegab, Ghaleb Halsa and Yousri Khamis; the two assistant editors were Ibrahim Abdel-Atti and Saad Abdel-Wahab; the managing editor was Gamil Attiya Ibrahim.

In the first editorial of *Gallerie '68* we read: "The Arab nation is at present undergoing a momentous, painful experience... For the military defeat that has befallen our nation was not an ending in itself but was the exorbitant price of reaching the truth. It is the truth that constitutes the solid ground on which we stand today, awaiting the glorious moment of birth."

The same editorial also outlined the position *Gallerie '68* intended to adopt as its own: "Although the magazine is not political, we believe that if it succeeds in revealing the innermost feelings and ideas of writers, poets and artists of this generation, it will have fulfilled its promise to participate in the battle for liberation and reconstruction."

The warmth with which the magazine was received by readers and critics came as a complete surprise to the editors. The packaging (layout and paper) of the magazine could not have been more primitive. Yet the content of *Gallerie '68* was refreshingly candid, at once daring and of the highest quality. And in subsequent issues, the magazine continued its programme. There was much tilling of the literary terrain: *Gallerie '68* published short-stories, poems, translations and critical studies, as well as reproducing new artworks.

The magazine, in an effort to reassert Pan-Arab cultural unity, also published writers from across the Arab world, among them Abdel-Wahab Al-Bayati and Ali Zein Al-Abedin. Likewise, the magazine afforded a space to writers regardless of their ideology or the aesthetic tradition in which they worked, and it *is* by virtue of this catholicity that *Gallerie '68* became a canvas on which the features of a new writing were slowing to gain definition. Many of today's household names emerged from the *Gallerie '68* experience: Amal Donqol, Yehia El-Taher Abdullah, Abdel-Hakim Qassim, Bahaa Taher, Mohamed El-Bisatie, Gamil Attiya Ibrahim and Ibrahim Aslan. Yet although many of the writers first "discovered" by *Gallerie '68* continued to produce after the magazine closed its doors, other voices were to eventually fall silent.

*Reviewed by **Mahmoud El-Wardani***

Plain Talk

In the short time it has existed, the Cultural Development Fund, headed by Samir Gharib, has worked steadily towards greater promotion of the arts. The activities it sponsors range from film festivals, translations of important books from Arabic into foreign languages and vice versa and music competitions, among other things. Its offices, adjacent to the Opera House, are like a beehive, and its many publications and brochures reflect the dedication and efficiency of Gharib and his team.

I often wonder how Gharib, with all his commitments, manages to write books, and on such a wide range of subjects — from the history of art to creative writing. His latest publication, *Nuqoush 'ala Zaman* (Engravings on Time), reveals the importance we in Egypt have always given to the arts.

But let me begin at the beginning. The book is a review of Egyptian writings on the history of art and, as such, is an important record of art historical texts published in the present century.

The first writer mentioned in the book is Ahmed Youssef, a young man who, at the age of 18, produced his first book *Fine Arts: Old and New*. Apart from descriptions of such Egyptian artists as Mohamed Nagui, Youssef Kamel, Ragheb Ayyad, Ahmed Sabri and Mahmoud Said, this first book reflected on the pronouncements on art made by two leading Islamic thinkers: Sheikh Mohamed Abduh and Sheikh Mohamed Rashid Reda. In his capacity as Grand Mufti, Mohamed Abduh issued a *fatwa* to the effect pursuit of the arts did not constitute a religious offence. Sheikh Rashid went even further. He argued that painting and sculpture are not *haram* (a sin), concluding by saying that "painting is one of the cornerstones of civilisation."

After resurrecting the work done by Youssef, Gharib deals with a number of art historians, including Mahmoud Khairat, Ahmed Teymour and Zaki Hassan. Today, these names may not mean a great deal to our readers, but suffice it to mention the titles and subjects of their books. In the first half of the century, Arabic books were written by Egyptians on Goya, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and others.

In spite of the spate of books published we find some writers deploring the "apparent lack of artistic taste which is reflected in the melange of architectural styles one sees in Cairo," a subject more fully explored by Sedki El-Gabakhangi, a leading art teacher and critic. El-Gabakhangi is quoted by Gharib as saying that "the *aim of the fine arts is* to raise Man above his existence," and that "nature is the source of art."

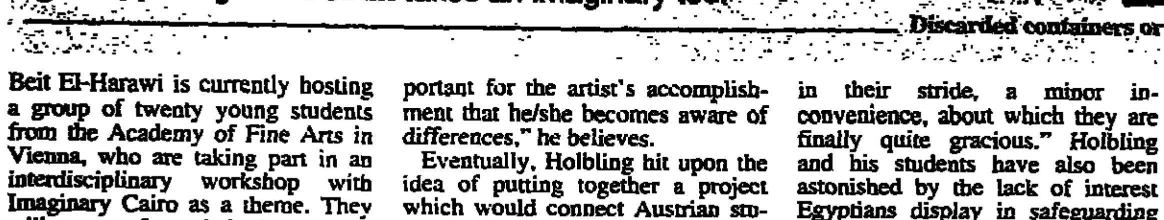
Some of the writers mentioned in this book have left an indelible mark on the development of art in Egypt. Foremost among these is Habib Gorgi, who, together with Ramses Wissa-Wassef, championed experiments in spontaneous art. Gorgi, together with Shafik Zaher and Mohamed Abdel-Hadi, published in 1938 *A Dialogue of the Arts*. The three of them also published the first magazine specialising in the arts, the organ of the union of the International Union of Art and Education. Its aim — which was also the aim of the union — was to develop and promote the teaching of art in schools. The magazine, which continued from 1937 to 1945, is described by Gharib as the longest lasting publication of its kind.

One more interesting subject Gharib brings up is the teaching of art in schools. Pleased as I was to discover the amount of attention the Ministry of Education accorded to the teaching of art in the past, I was equally chagrined about the cursory treatment of it these days. The ministry used to commission art teachers to write books about the history of art, both for primary and secondary schools. We find Mohamed Youssef Hammam producing a series of books on Italian, Flemish, German, French, English and American art. The Committee of Authorship, Translation and Publishing also brought out a series of simplified books on artists in the form of narrative. In comparison one cannot but lament the present situation.

Mursi Saad El-Din

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The way they see it



An imagined city is not the sum of its parts. It is a tea bag, light dappling the rooftops, or a sheet of blank paper, on which images swirl. Fayza Hassan takes an imaginary tour

Discarded containers or life's artistic creation?

Beit El-Harawi is currently hosting a group of twenty young students from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, who are taking part in an interdisciplinary workshop with Imaginary Cairo as a theme. They will emerge from their three week-stay in the city with an unusual crop of impressions.

"Look at this," says Omar Holbling, one of the group's leaders, pointing towards a waste area between two buildings. "Let us, for a moment, forget that it is a garbage dump, and observe it with the eyes of someone who is not aware of the connotations and problems attached to such a heap in the middle of an overcrowded neighbourhood. Look at the bright colours of the plastic bags dotting the mound, as the sun shines on them. From a purely artistic point of view, it can be beautiful; it is pointillism in the raw."

Standing on the terrace of Beit El-Harawi, Holbling explains the experiment he is conducting, together with Michael Sorkin from New York and Christian Seethaler from Vienna. He came to Cairo in 1979 on a scholarship and developed such a passion for the city that he stayed on for two years. Later, he came back frequently on short visits. The fascination remained. He tremendously enjoyed the atmosphere, the hustle and bustle, the interaction of different strata of civilisation and many layers of intermingled cultures.

Maybe because his wife is Muslim, he has become sensitive to the way other cultures perceive Islam. "In Austria and in the West in general, little is known about Islam and this little is usually wrong," he says. " To discover the way people actually live Islam is an enlightening experience, which may erase many misunderstandings."

Teaching at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Vienna, Holbling had felt for a long time that contact with a culture totally alien to their own, providing an experience in dislocation, would enrich his students, honing their sensitivity. "It is important for the artist's accomplishment that he/she becomes aware of differences," he believes.

Eventually, Holbling hit upon the idea of putting together a project which would connect Austrian students with a different reality, allowing them to observe, first-hand, a city belonging to another world. Cairo, with its complex historical, social, religious and spacial structures, presented itself as the perfect field for the experiment. His ideas finally took the form of an extended workshop organised in co-operation with Cairo University and the University of Helwan, which would gather Egyptian as well as Austrian students of art and architecture, the latter inventing strategies to approach the "unknown" city, examined through "Western eyes", while the former attempted to rethink their natural environment, rediscovering it in the vision of the stranger, the "other".

The chosen headquarters for the workshop was an old house built in the Islamic style, the restored Beit El-Harawi, while the students were accommodated at the hotel of the Faculty of Tourism, near the Meridien hotel. The students were encouraged from the beginning to find their own way from their hotel to Beit El-Harawi, riding public buses, or walking part of the way. They were allowed to roam freely; the only guidelines were provided by a number of lectures given by Egyptian architects and artists on some of the architectural and artistic aspects of the city. No guided tours were on offer, no special directions indicated. Discovery and personal observation were high on the agenda.

Traffic and the way it is handled in Cairo attracted the Austrian visitors' attention immediately. "Considering the number of cars involved and the distance between two given cars at any given time, you have a considerably lower rate of accident than any other country," says Holbling. "Motorists seem to take the heavier-than- normal traffic in their stride, a minor inconvenience, about which they are finally quite gracious." Holbling and his students have also been astonished by the lack of interest Egyptians display in safeguarding their property. "We often see people leaning or sitting on cars which do not even belong to them. In Austria, if someone did that, all hell would break loose instantly. When Egyptian motorists have minor accidents, they may get into a shouting match for a while, but eventually they make up and everything is fine again. You don't know what would happen to you if you negligently put a dent in someone's fender in my country!"

The lack of familiarity with the surroundings and the mentality, as well as the limitation in time and tools of investigation, says Holbling, were necessarily going to produce disconnected fragments of observation. How these fragments are linked together will be crucial to the success of the experiment, which will end in Vienna later this year. He likens the research the students are doing now to sending probes to Mars. The crop of information will have to be collated, analysed and put together. Will a coherent whole take shape? Will it lead to a better — or simply different — understanding of the city? He expects "many Cairos" to emerge, "each [with] its specific qualities, [a consequence] of the tools of observation and documentation used, as well as the topics, points of view and strategies adopted." If the procedure is of any value, then each "new" vision of the city will become a sort of catalyst attracting yet more new visions, with the labour of imagination leading slowly to rational thinking and finally to sound planning for a "future Cairo".

The practical application of the project was carried out by students working alone or in teams and who, having selected a target (a specific area, a building, part of a construction or a recurring phenomenon) and the method of recording the visual data (photography, painting, drawing, etc...) applied themselves to documenting and recording, over and over again, their (changing) perceptions of the same subject.

A team of two Austrian women spent a day and a night with a large family (father, mother, eight girls, two boys), living on a roof-top in the Batniya area. For twenty-four hours, they photographed the family every few minutes, while its members engaged in the most mundane activities, such as making and serving tea, peeling vegetables, sweeping their living quarters, or sleeping. This experiment was rendered particularly arduous by the fact that the students spoke no Arabic and the family did not understand a word of German.

Meanwhile, another team concentrated on the washing hung daily from the balconies of a high-rise building opposite Beit El-Harawi, recording the number of washed items at each balcony, their colours and shapes, and capturing on camera the differences in texture and shades of wet and dry garments; they observed the way women collected the clothes at dusk, folding the dry sheets, pulling on certain items to erase the creases... One female student working alone has endeavoured to record her impressions of the streets she had just visited, by sitting blindfolded in the middle of a large sheet of paper, trying to retrace her steps, and "seeing the landscape from inside".

Another male student has been gathering discarded household objects, attempting to observe them "for the first time". Was their function evident? Could they be used differently? The traditional basket made of palm fronds has caught his attention. Its craftsmanship is faultless, he said, its aspect pleasing, its uses diverse. It is the kind of object that appeals to his imagination, because he can picture the basketmakers selecting the appropriate palm branches, cleaning them and preparing to work on them with the simplest tools. As an added bonus, it creates no pollution, unlike plastic containers with a similar purpose. Working on one of the open terraces of Beit El-Harawi, his recuperated baskets — the yield of the day — displayed on a makeshift table, he attempts to explain how valuable these finds were to him in his understanding of patterns of consumption. Meanwhile, he cuts thin strips from newspapers, wrapping them carefully arround the palm stalks. Is the humble basket being transformed into a papier maché objet trouvé? He is not really sure yet, he says.

Another team, observing the additions of floors to existing buildings and placing the numerous photographs of these additions together, are in the process of "isolating" a new layer in the existing city, altering its dimensions by "erasing" or adding the extra floors. By observing their work, one has become aware of the architectural stratification produced by the addition of floors in different styles. "It is like a new city within the city," explains one of the students. "One can learn a great deal about the dwellers of a building by looking at the extensions."

"How different it all is from Austria," says Holbling. "It is really a mind-boggling experience for the students. But they are very excited, and a number of them are planning to come back when all this is finished." Holbling is referring to the two-day exhibition which is taking place presently at Beit El-Harawi and which will show the work done so far by the students, consisting of collections of photographs, drawings, sketches, paintings, collages and graphics, representing the data collected, on which they will be working at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Vienna, later this year. Taking the data as a starting point, they will have to carry their "imaginary Cairo" into the design of a "Cairo of the future", created by extending the images received into an artistic and architectural "conclusion".



Career woman

In my youth, little boys wanted to be firemen, while little girls, with few exceptions, wished to become nurses. Every now and again, the odd child would indicate that he wanted to be a soldier or an explorer, she, a teacher, but these variations were few and far between. A couple of my daintier classmates squirmed prettily every time the question was popped by a well-intentioned grown-up, and lisped that they wanted to be mummies with lots of babies. I had no sympathy for them.

I personally saw my own future rather like a blank page, but declared nevertheless to all and sundry that I was going to be a lawyer like my father. I did not really know what one did when one engaged in this line of business, save speaking at the top of one's voice on the phone, but I vaguely sensed that it was something important. "You can't be a lawyer," my father told me one day: "only your brother will be one." He thus burst my bubble, without giving me any alternatives on which to peg my scholastic efforts. For a while, I proceeded without direction until, one day, my math teacher hinted that I had a talent for numbers. Once more I went public, telling every one that I was going be a mathematician. My parents' lack of enthusiasm eventually deterred me from pursuing a career of which I could already perceive the difficulty.

If not a mathematician, however, then what? "Can I be a fireman?" I asked my mother. She answered that only boys became firemen, and not our boys for that matter. In our family we engaged in more glorious endeavours.

For many years my direction remained indeterminate and, one day, I had to graduate from university — as undecided as ever. I took jobs — many different jobs; but there was never any label which could sum up accurately what I was doing at any given time. On my papers, I was flatly described as "without profession". I abstained from having visiting cards since I could not dream up a flattering proficiency to follow my name. Like it or not, I had to accept the fact that I was what is commonly known as a Jane of all trades. I was therefore extremely surprised when I heard the principal of the school where I had been hired to teach French welcome the new staff as real professionals. Surely he could not have been referring to me, an Egyptian teaching French, for the first time, in an Australian school...

With time, however, I began to see distinctive advantages to my lack of specialisation. I learned to present my (by then quite long) CV in such a way that prospective employers were able to read into it whatever they were looking for. I was never unemployed. Wherever I went, I instantly became an experienced candidate for whatever job was on offer. Proud of my versatility, I was no longer bothered by the fact that I was without a "profession". I thought of myself as someone who could make do whatever the odds. My husband, if not downright awestruck, admired my powers of resilience and boasted that he, unlike many Egyptian husbands he knew, encouraged his wife's initiatives. I, alone among the wives, did not sit and mope, but was always able to get us out of a spot of financial trouble. He never missed an opportunity to brag about my abilities. One day, however, he suddenly withdrew his support.

With two young children, it had been impossible for me to consider a full-time job for a while, and we sorely missed the extra income. At this point, I saw an ad in the local paper: the council was looking for female garbage collectors, no previous experience required. I applied. Working hours were from 2 to 5 am, giving me plenty of time to be home before the children woke up. The salary was handsome — more than I had ever earned pushing papers in offices. There was a neat white uniform to go with the position; besides, this was as close as I would ever get to becoming a fireman. It was going to be great fun: we had to hang on to the side of the huge garbage truck, leap off as it slowed down, run up to the spot where regulation garbage bags awaited us, seize them and come back at a brisk trot; we then swung our load onto the truck and, grabbing the rail, hoisted ourselves back onto the moving vehicle. As an added bonus it was going to save me the trouble and expense of exercise classes. This is perfect, I told myself. When I enthusiastically described my new job to my husband, he almost choked. "What's the matter?" I asked, puzzled at his excessive concern for my safety; "it's not dangerous at all." Surely, no one would think to hold up a garbage collector at gunpoint — an experience I had been unfortunate enough to undergo at the hands of a former employer. But danger was the farthest thing from my husband's mind. His support for women's emancipation went only so far, no farther. Gone was his pride in my professional versatility, so in evidence when I was making sandwiches in a delicatessen, helping out in kindergartens or baby-sitting the neighbours' children. Why, after all, were these more noble occupations than collecting rubbish? "Me", he spluttered, "married to the *zabbal*!"

Fayza Hassan

Making up for lost time

THE SPECIAL needs of adolescent girls must be taken into account in any comprehensive development plan. This belief has prompted the Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) to launch its New Horizons programme. **Amany Abdel-Moneim** reports.

Egyptian girls and young women face a number of challenges today: limited access to formal education; illiteracy, especially in rural areas; early marriage and early motherhood; lack of reproductive health information; anaemia; female genital mutilation; low status; low wages and limited work opportunities. Yet to policy planners, adolescent girls represent a tremendous human resource that has yet to be fully explored.

Since 1994, the CEDPA has been working with Egyptian NGOs to improve the educational status, health and well-being of female adolescents. In partnership with eight NGOs representing four governorates, the Centre has developed New Horizons, an informal education programme for disadvantaged girls and young women between the ages of nine and 20, living in Minya, Beni Suef and Fayoum. "The purpose of the programme is to provide girls who may not have had the chance to attend formal school with basic life skills as well as information on health, nutrition, reproductive health, and the environment to prepare them for adulthood," explains Peggy Curlin, president of the CEDPA in Washington. The New Horizons programme was successfully piloted in Fayoum, Beni Suef, Minya, and Cairo.

New Horizons consists of 100 sessions, and includes a kit of colorful posters, two instructors' manuals, and audio tapes with songs, poetry and drama. "Each hour-long session covers one subject area," says Curlin. The programme can be implemented wherever a group of 15-20 girls can gather comfortably: a school, mosque, church, NGO centre, or someone's home — even in a field or a courtyard — for open and informal discussion.



Equality in literacy

Sufra Dayma

Veal in cream and mustard sauce

Ingredients:
1/2 kg veal (thin strips)
1 large red bell pepper (thin strips)
1 large green bell pepper (thin strips)
2 tbsp. mustard paste
1 can of cream
Salt+pepper+hot paprika
Butter+oil

Method:
Stir-fry the veal strips in a mixture of butter and oil, only until they colour. Remove the veal. Add the green and red pepper. When they become tender, add the veal then add the spices plus the mustard. Stir over medium heat for ten minutes then add the can of cream. Stir it in until it blends well with the other ingredients. When it melts, remove from heat. Do not overheat. Serve hot with spaghetti, sautéed vegetables and a green salad.

N.B. Re-heating of this dish may cause the cream to curdle

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Where's Trigger?

Andrew Steele *examines the joys of Roy's*

It used to be called Roy Rogers. Now it's just plain old Roy's. Franchises come and go, however, and little has changed. The decor is still not quite self-assured enough, contriving to look as though the "Wanted" posters, branding irons and wagon wheels were afterthoughts, rather than an integral concept in the space's design. The lavatories are labeled Cowboys and Cowgirls to add toilet humour to the theme.

Tex-Mex feed is served by erstwhile cowboys, with the emphasis very much on the Tex rather than the Mex. We were seated promptly by, it has to be said, a rather grubby-looking waiter, and presented with the flimsy, well-thumbed menus that detail Roy's bill of fare. There are numerous flacid witticisms therein, to jolly the cantankerous diner along with giddy promises of free food for the gluttonous — stuff yourself silly on six days' worth of set platters, and lo and behold, the seventh day's chow is free. Not that one would want to. The food here is mediocre at best and rather pricey to boot. No sign of Trigger, either.

We began our luncheon with the nattily-monikered Chicago Style Dip. This promised a generous bowl of creamy relish, laced with the dangerous combination of artichokes and spinach. It arrived with a pleasing swiftness, surrounded by toasted sections of baladi bread. Now, as Joan, my companion, opined, and I tend to agree with her, no bread is better than stale bread, and the bread that was served could not be disguised by its toasted pretensions. To say that it was day-old would be generous. The dip proved little better. It had been made from cream cheese without the cheese and perked up with the odd shredded leaf and a dash of black pepper. Not unpleasant, but taste it did not.

The main courses were hardly exciting. Well-cooked, granted and one of them, at least, quite reasonably priced, but neither Tex nor Mex immediately spring to mind when fishing for locutions to best describe them. Joan's Catfish Filet did not even slightly resemble that bony river dweller from which it takes its name; in fact, the waiter intimated that it was a seabass. It came lightly battered with a slurry of mashed potatoes, rather too heavy on the butter. My shrimps were insipid, as shrimps often are, and the gungy rice that accompanied did them no favours. The coffee that so aids one's digestion was small, black and mean, rather like Joan's cat, but, unlike the latter, it went down a treat.

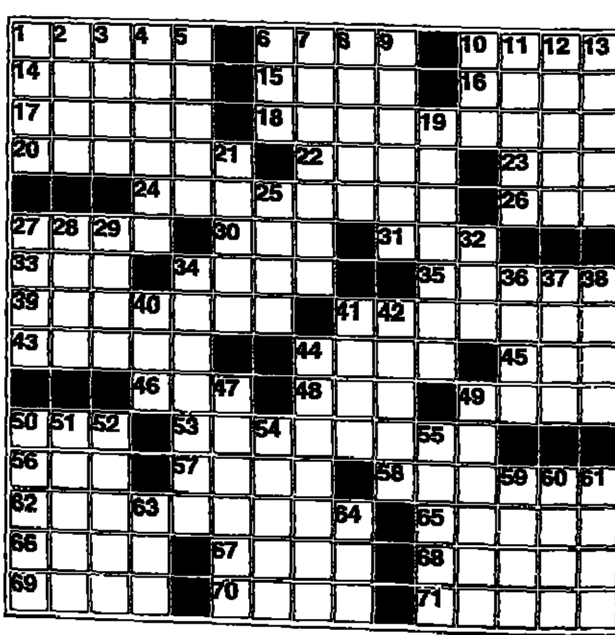
Neither here nor there is the inevitable conclusion. No regrets, no tearful good-byes, to misquote the dirge-like pop hit. And at LE120 for lunch for two with two Perriers, what on earth would Trigger think?

Roy's at the Marriott, 16 Sarayat El-Gezira, Zamalek
Tel: 340 8888

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour



Across
1. Small anchor (5)
6. Living quarters (4)
10. Pillows; stuffs; tramps along (4)
14. Standard of perfection (5)
15. Give one's word; contend (4)
16. Region (4)
17. Mother-of-pearl (5)
18. Bird found around marshes (9)
20. A tennis hard stroke (6)
22. Anarchy; street fight (4)
23. Queer (3)
24. Make plant pale by excluding light (8)
26. Weather directions (3)
27. Singe; cauterize (4)
30. Long narrow inlet formed by submergence of a river valley (3)
31. ...Lanka (3)
33. Its stem is used by shepherds as musical pipe (3)
34. SOS (3)
35. Words used to identify persons or things (5)
39. Virility; bravery (7)
41. Conveyance; passage (7)
43. Lukewarm (5)
44. baffle 94)
45. Weather directions (3)
46. The... =fashionable society (3)
48. Hospice (3)
49. Utopian garden (3)
50. Projection on rotating part of machine (3)
53. ...oblige (8)
56. fermented beer (3)
57. Folk hero; sacred cow (4)
58. Mountaineering rope ladder with rungs of metal (6)
62. Jeers et; derisions (9)
65. Cleft on moon;'s surface (5)
66. Ancient Greek coin (4)
67. Behind time (4)
68. Wide-awake (5)
69. Lap up; smack (4)
70. Existence (5)
71. Small casket (5)

Down
1. Relations (4)
2. Round cheese (4)
3. Comb. form "ten" (4)
4. Sock suspender (6)
5. Opt; give one's vote 95)
6. Owns (3)
7. Extend beyond (7)
8. Telepathists (5)
9. Fungi (6)
10. Trotter; handle clumsily (3)
11. Dart (5)
12. Proceedings; actions (5)
13. Gravels (5)
19. Perpetual (7)
21. Employs (5)
25. Paint, fat and grease 94)
27. One Egyptian (4)
28. Wild rabbit (4)
29. Above (4)
32. Electrically charged particle (3)
34. Sybaritic; la dolce vita (7)
36. Operated (4)
37. Number of pins and skittles (4)
38. British WWII gun (4)
40. Jocularity (3)
41. Sonance (4)
42. Lave (5)
44. Boned sections of fish (7)
47. Small swelling of cell (6)
49. In a weird manner (6)
50. Joyous song (5)
51. Excuse (5)
52. A French red claret (5)
54. Missile consisting of many balls when hurled, entangles limbs of quarry (5)
55. Girdle; bind (5)
59. Evergreen oak (4)
60. Rile; jumbled (4)
61. Softens hemp by soaking (4)
63. Family; same name or place (3)
64. Ogle (3)

Last week's solution

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

207

Egypt's present-day Police Academy grew out of modest beginnings in the early 19th century when the government had to draw on army conscripts for police training. The first proper police academy was established in the Cairo district of Boulaq in 1900 under the command of an army officer. It was shifted to the Citadel in 1904 and remained there for two years before being moved to independent premises in Abbasiya district. Dr Yunan Labib Rizk traces the history of the academy from reports published by *Al-Ahram*


Illustration: Makram Henein

"Most of the graduates of this school have been assigned to various parts of the country and the news we have received concerning them from those parts does not inspire ease of mind. It appears that two years at their desks in that school have so bloated their opinion of themselves as to blind them to reality. They are dispatched to the provinces and city police stations without having learned a thing. The results are such that we have come to despair of finding a refined, educated and just policeman. We direct this appeal to the adviser to the Ministry of Interior in the hope that he turns his attention to reforming the system of education in that school so that every graduate of that institute knows his duties. This reform would, in turn, contribute to the reform of government administration, instead of compounding corruption with the corruption of its officers of the law."

This severe criticism of the National Police Academy appeared in *Al-Ahram* of 9 November 1905. It was occasioned by an advertisement placed in the newspaper by the Ministry of Interior, announcing openings for "thirty young men of strong build and healthy constitution to attend a six-month training programme in the Police Academy. Graduates of this programme will be appointed in the police corps with the rank of corporal. Priority consideration will be given to those applicants who, in addition to a sturdy build, have some knowledge of a European language and have an elementary school certificate. Applicants must be 18 to 24 years of age." Taking another stab at the system, *Al-Ahram* pleaded. "If only the Ministry of Interior would look beyond height, broad shoulders and large heads, to consider intelligence and strength of mind!"

At the same time, the newspaper took the occasion to present an account of the history of the Police Academy. It wrote, "At one time it was the custom to recruit police from the army, which would give the police their least suitable men. In 1891, Kitchener Pasha, at that time inspector-general of the police, decided to train police officers in the law. He enrolled successive groups of those officers in the Royal Law Academy to learn the basics of law, thereby opening the door in that institution for other young educated men, many of whom graduated to become officers of the law. In 1896, due to the mobilisation for the Sudanese expedition, the army stopped supplying the police forces with officers. As a result, the number of volunteers in the police force increased while the number of army officers diminished, requiring Sir Eldon Gorst, then adviser to the Ministry of Interior, to increase the numbers of cadets selected to receive academic training. In 1900, a school was established in Boulaq to accommodate these students and, in 1901, General Khalil Bek Hamdi from the Infantry Brigade was appointed commandant of that school."

The newspaper's account noted that several British officials were instrumental in improving police education. In particular, it observed that "the school made much tangible progress under the guidance of Mr. Mitchell, adviser to the Ministry of Interior, and under the immediate direction of its commandant who was an energetic and enthusiastic young man, keen on discipline."

In 1904, the Police Academy was moved to the Citadel where it grew to accommodate 300 students per year. After a nine month training period, graduates were awarded the rank of constable. Also, *Al-Ahram* notes, they were given higher salaries than police conscripts from the army. The school also provided advanced training to 60 students of officer rank and produced 30 new police officers per year.

In his book *The Egyptian Police: 1805-1922*, Abdel-Wahab Bakr provides further useful information. Applicants had to provide two documents: a certificate of good character and a certificate testifying that they were unmarried. Once accepted, students were expected to study law in the Royal School of Law, with a focus on military and police law. Students received a stipend of LE24 per year. They were also provided with the essential arms and equipment, but they were required to furnish their own uniforms and pay for their food.

In 1904, the Legislative Council introduced a number of changes affecting the Police Academy. The period of training was lengthened to two years to allow for additional material in the curriculum. Now, beyond elementary law training, students also received instruction in handling prosecution in the district courts "in all matters under the jurisdiction of these courts."

In 1906 the school moved out of the Citadel. On 1 May *Al-Ahram* announced, "Students of the Police Academy were moved out of the Citadel so that their school could serve as temporary quarters for the British troops." Expressing wide consternation and surprise at this move, the newspaper commented, "The government could have found a suitable place for the soldiers without closing down the school."

Construction began on the new Police Academy in Abbasiya. Unfortunately, it encountered a severe shortage in funding. As *Al-Ahram* explained, by the end of 1906, the government had allocated only LE55,000 to enlarge the building, and the British adviser to the Ministry of Finance failed to provide more funds. *Al-Ahram* was prompted to comment, "The exigencies of tomorrow will require considerably more than this sum. Indeed, they will require about LE100,000 in light of the plans to increase the student body to 600, raise the salaries of the officers and increase the teaching staff."

While construction was under way, the police academy took up temporary premises in Sherif Pasha Palace. It was during this interval that *Al-Ahram*'s Editor-in-Chief Daoud Barakat decided to write one of the few journalistic documentaries on this school.

"Sherif Palace struck us with its withered silence. A student at the door with his sword drawn reminded us that we were entering a military barrack, not a palace. In the courtyard students were performing military drills under the supervision of the commandant. Where once a horde of servants bustled in the service of a single individual, I found a large number of individuals in eager training for the service of the nation."

After a tour of the premises, Daoud Barakat interviewed Major Elgood. In light of this man's recent appointment to serve at the school, *Al-Ahram*'s editor-in-chief asked him whether there was any truth in the rumour that there were plans to dismiss Khalil Bek Hamdi. Elgood denied the rumour, explaining, "I was appointed to serve as an adviser and assistant to him. The school has grown considerably and the government plans to increase its size. It is impossible for a single individual to perform all the tasks that are required in running this school. Therefore, the commandant is in charge of administration and I put my experience at his service as best I can. My role here is not to give orders but to give advice."

Daoud Barakat asked Elgood about reports concerning the government's intention to introduce fundamental changes into the system of recruiting police. Elgood confirmed the reports. Although the project was still under study, he said, "it consists of reducing military service to only five years. After they are discharged, soldiers will be free to volunteer to serve in the police forces. As the government is also planning to enlarge the Police Academy and increase the salaries of the constables, it is also being considered to recruit police from the military conscription lists. Individuals drafted into the police will serve five years, as do their colleagues in the army, after which they will be eligible for discharge."

The interview did little to dispel certain complaints against the school. Voicing the opinion of a considerable segment of the public, *Al-Ahram* wrote that the Police Academy was the most expensive school in the country, "particularly when you consider the fact that police school graduates have acquired no other qualifications to enable them to seek employment outside of government service." According to the newspaper, tuition fees in the school were LE60 per year, whereas "in the military academy students pay only LE15 for their first year of tuition, after which they are exempted from further tuition fees." It expressed fear that the high fee structure would make the Police Academy a monopoly for the rich, in spite of the fact that "it is well known that the poor are much more serious and industrious since they seek for themselves a secure source of income and social advancement, while the rich, once tired of service, can always choose to resign in comfort."

As such grumbling against the school mounted, the government would increasingly feel compelled to make reforms. The watershed year was 1909 when the Ministry of Interior formed a committee to determine the weaknesses of the school and make recommendations for reform. These recommendations, according to Abdel-Wahab Bakr, were ultimately incorporated into "the first national law pertaining to the Police Academy since its founding."

The new law introduced radical changes into the system of admission requirements and the curriculum of study. It was decided that only elementary school graduates would be accepted. The reasoning was that students who have obtained secondary school degrees would naturally want to continue their education in such domains as law, medicine and engineering. "In view of the moral and material prospects before them, one strongly doubts that a sufficient number of secondary school graduates would apply to the Police Academy." It was further argued that "the military discipline in the school and the boarding system would not suit graduates of secondary schools who had grown accustomed to a much broader degree of freedom."

In order to compensate for the lower educational level upon entrance, training in the Police Academy was extended to four years. The first two years offered many of the requisites of a secondary school certificate. In particular "sufficient scope will be given to the study of the Arabic language, for there is no denying the importance of excellent language skills in a position that demands conducting criminal investigations and frequent report writing."

In the two subsequent years, students would receive intensive instruction in criminal, financial and administrative law. "At this phase," writes *Al-Ahram*, "students will have acquired the aptitude to comprehend the subject matter and to engage in some practical judicial tasks such as writing court minutes, examining case files and writing summaries in order to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of legal proceedings."

In order to pre-empt qualms that the four-year programme would be too stressful, in light of the military nature of the schooling, and therefore drive away potential applicants, the committee stressed that "military drills and exercises will be kept at a minimum."

Other provisions included in the new law for the Police Academy concerned arrangements for feeding, clothing, and a school canteen.

The committee's recommendations were made law on 6 September 1909. It was to come into effect the following October. An additional clause pertained to disciplinary procedures. The new law prohibited all forms of corporal punishment. Instead, punishments ranged from verbal reprimands before the class or before the entire student body and grounding students in the school on weekends to refusing students permission to sit the year-end exams and, finally, to expulsion from the school. It is interesting that, to this day, the Police Academy continues to apply very much the same disciplinary code.

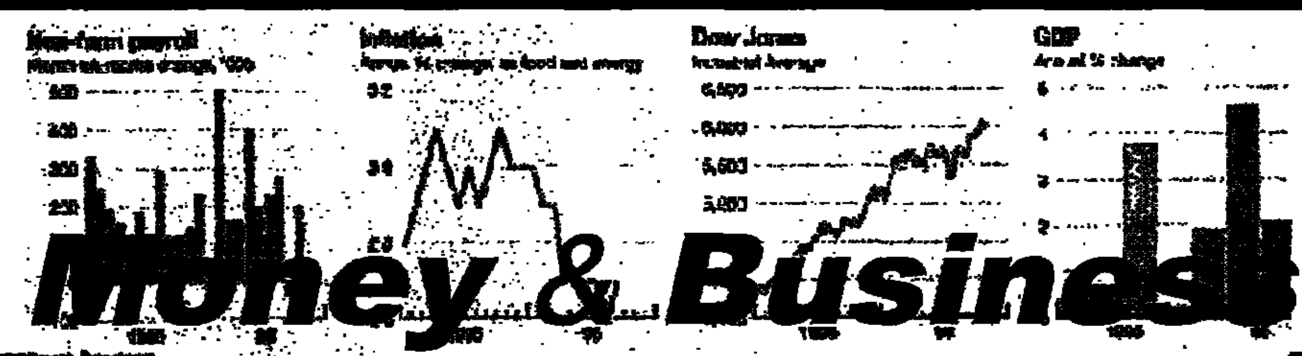


The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Money & Business

Economic laws available in English

IT'S NO secret that the successful results of the economic reform policies have paved the way for international investment in Egypt. To further encourage companies, individuals and businessmen wishing to establish new companies and investments in the new communities and free zones, Al-Sharq Al-Awsat for Economic Services now offers all of Egypt's economic laws and decrees in English, a service that will no doubt save foreign companies time in planning their projects. What's more, in addition to economic laws, all labour, tax, customs, insurance, environment and pollution laws and regulations will be available in English. For more information, call: 3351141, fax. 3606804.



3 Egyptian-Russian companies established

A PROTOCOL was signed recently between the Egyptian Industries Federation on its Russian counterpart with the aim of strengthening relations between the two countries, to exchange data among businessmen from both sides in order to develop joint ventures.

Mamdouh Thabit Mekki, representative of the Cairo Chamber of Commerce and head of the Tanning Section of the Egyptian Federation of Industries, said that an agreement has been signed to establish 3 joint companies, one for agricultural products, one for transportation, and one for industrial goods.

ACITEX pavilion at SYSTEMS 97 in Munich, Germany

IN VIEW of the great success which the Al-Ahram Computer and Information Technology Exhibition (ACITEX) meets with every year, the German Exhibition Authority in Munich offered to place an ACITEX pavilion at its annual SYSTEMS 1997 computer exhibition. SYSTEMS, considered one of the largest international gatherings of computer, telecommunications and Internet companies in the world, will likewise have a pavilion during ACITEX 1998, which will take place for the sixth time in Cairo from 18-21 February 1998 at the Cairo International Conference Centre.


The ACITEX pavilion at SYSTEMS 97

The ACITEX pavilion at SYSTEMS met with favour from exhibition officials and visitors alike, who were eager to become familiar with distinguished Egyptian computer companies and the services of Al-Ahram Management and Computer Centre (AMAC), in addition to details about ACITEX itself, which will be held from 18-21 February 1998 at the Cairo International Conference Centre.

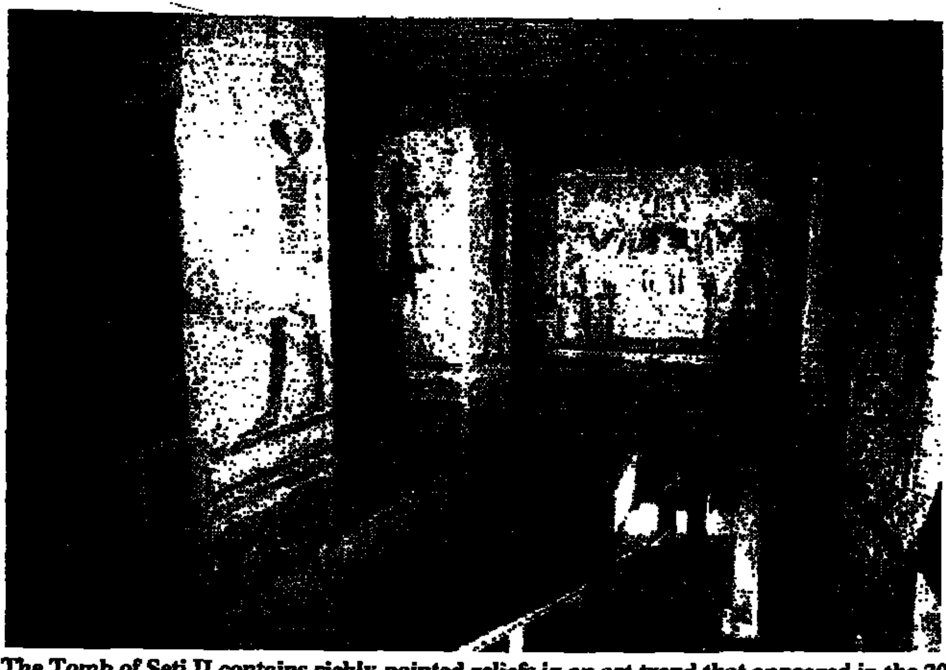
At the same time and place as ACITEX, the 6th Artificial Intelligence Conference will be held, thus giving Egypt a real boost in the area of computer and information technology.

There is no doubt that SYSTEMS and ACITEX will serve as ideal forums for an international exchange of ideas in the field of computers and information technology.

IBM Voicetype Simply Speaking: a breakthrough for PCs

IBM's new dictating system, Voicetype Simply Speaking, is considered by all means a revolution in the world of PCs. With this new programme you can talk into the computer, dictate your letters or reports and e-mail. Imagine sitting at your computer but instead of using your keyboard as usual, you talk into a microphone plugged into the computer, while the words appear instantly and accurately on the screen.

IBM's new programme, Voicetype Simply Speaking is the fruit of 25 years of research and hard work for development. Arab programmers participated with IBM in Cairo to produce a version of this programme in Arabic, reflecting the company's interest in supporting its Arabic speaking customers and providing them with the latest technology.


photos: Khaled El-Fiqi
The Tomb of Seti II contains richly-painted reliefs in an art trend that appeared in the 20th Dynasty

Royal resting places unveiled

Four tombs have recently been opened to the public in the Valley of the Kings, revealing stunning new wall decorations. **Nevine El-Aref** investigates

In the unlikely event of the tourist's fascination with the tombs in the Valley of the Kings fading, four more tombs, recently opened to the public on the necropolis, will not fail to please. Two royal tombs dating from the end of the 19th — early 20th — Dynasty, approximately 1215 to 1209 BC, are being opened for the first time, and two noblemen's tombs in nearby Dar Abul-Nagga are being re-opened, following their closure early this year for restoration.

Before being opened, the tombs underwent major restoration and conservation work. "The tombs' walls have been reinforced, the reliefs and colours consolidated, and new wooden ladders, flooring and lighting systems installed," said Mohamed El-Saghir, director of antiquities in Upper Egypt.

The large Tomb of Queen Tawsert and Setnakht dates from around 1215 BC. Tawsert was a queen consort twice during her lifetime, marrying first King Sebtah and then King Seti II. The tomb was begun by Tawsert and her second husband, whose reliefs appear on the walls, but it was later usurped by King Setnakht who, according to El-Saghir, "was not related to the queen but nevertheless usurped the tomb for himself, having failed to construct one of his own, recarving some of the reliefs and cartouches with his name."

The tomb is one of the most well preserved in the Valley of Kings and, at 113 metres in length, is one of the largest. The entrance bears images of Tawsert before deities, and a succession of passages leading to an antechamber and Tawsert's burial chamber are decorated with scenes and inscriptions from the Book of the Dead.

When Setnakht usurped the tomb, he extended further passages to the rear, leading to his own burial chamber where, deep in the mountain, his granite sarcophagus and mummy case in the shape of Osiris lord of the underworld lies. No trace of the queen's mummy was found, but the remains of the burial of Setnakht were recovered.

The Tomb of Seti II lies near that of Tawsert. He ruled Egypt from the end of the 19th Dynasty to the beginning of the 20th Dynasty, around 1209 BC. The tomb, which was restored in Ancient times, displays reliefs in a variety of styles, said El-Saghir. "Undoubtedly this era was a period of political turmoil and it [the tomb] suggests that Seti II may have been dethroned for some time and then reinstated. The tomb is 74 metres in length and has both coloured and uncoloured reliefs of the king performing different ceremonies," he commented.

The columns and walls of the inner chamber are rich in painted reliefs featuring the king with the sky goddess Nut and the gods Horus and Anubis. "The wall decorations in this tomb differ from others," said El-Saghir. "[The tomb] reflects a new trend in art which appeared during the 20th Dynasty, demonstrating very fine detailing of human features, clothing, and rich colours. Moreover, instead of the usual scenes of the king before deities in the inner corridors, there are representations of rich funerary objects including symbolic statuettes of gods and kings," he explained.

To the right of the tomb chamber an unidentified mummy was found which, according to Fathy Yassin, inspector on the West Bank, "is not of Seti II or any other king or known nobleman."

The two tombs at Dar Abul-Nagga differ from the royal tombs in size, architecture and decoration. While the royal tombs largely concern the kings' journey through the underworld to a life everlasting, the far smaller tombs of the nobles are adorned with scenes of daily life.

Shuroy was the head of incense burners of the god Amun, and his tomb consists of two small but richly painted halls. On both sides of the entrance the nobleman and his wife are shown adoring the god Re, Anubis, Atum, Hathour and Maat. Inside the tomb Shuroy's family attending a banquet is depicted, serving beer to their guests, watching dancers around a garden pool and presenting blue lotus plants. Other wall decorations relate to Shuroy's profession, showing him holding the incense burner in front of various deities.

The Tomb of Roy, the nobleman who held the position of the royal scribe and storehouse supervisor on the estates of Horemhab, is well preserved, the paintings on the entrance walls are particularly impressive. They depict Roy's daily agricultural activities in ploughing and harvesting scenes, and also show him performing religious rituals. The inner chamber contains mortuary texts and scenes from the Book of the Gates and the Day of Judgement.

Packaging Egypt

The International Arab Travel Market provided an opportunity for members of the tourist industry to highlight Egypt's — and the region's — potential. **Sherine Nasr** attended the event

The 5th Arab International Travel Market (IATM) held in Cairo last week provided tourist experts with an opportunity to exchange ideas and share experiences. It also gave Egypt the chance to promote its increasingly diversified tourist industry.

Among the main topics discussed on the fringe of the market was the importance of joint promotion of Egypt and Arab countries to the rest of the world. "During tours in Tokyo, I found that by stressing Egypt's tourist potential I was able to draw more attention to Bahrain's attractions," explained Kazem Gabr, head of the tourist bureau in Bahrain.

Long-distance travellers inevitably want to make the best use of their time and are inclined to visit more than one country in a region. "Thus, selling Egypt and Bahrain as a package is much more practical than selling each separately," said Gabr.

Faisal Fatfat of Lebanon endorsed the idea, stressing that an advantage to joint promotion was the proximity between various destinations in the Middle East. "Lebanese bureaux abroad promote packages that include Egypt as the main destination, as well as Jordan and Syria," he said.

To this end, more attention is being given to upgrading and completing road connections like the coastal highway which connects the countries of North Africa with Egypt. This road continues to Nuweiba where travellers can be transported to Aqaba in Jordan by ferry, and continue to Beirut and Damascus. The highway is a vital link particularly as more European travellers now choose to travel in four-wheel drives.

Certain areas in Egypt are fast becoming known for specific types of tourism. "Cairo, for example, is attracting more incentive tourism and conference tourism because of its excellent facilities," commented John Forten, the head of the Meeting World Association. The UK and the United States are among the main markets for incentive tourism, when holidays are given by employers as a reward for hard work, rather than cash bonuses. "These people stay for a long weekend, from Thursday to Sunday and spend sometimes as much as three times more than an average tourist," said Forten.

Safaga on the Red Sea is now fast gaining worldwide recognition as an ideal climatotherapy destination and recently the main German association for treating psoriasis established a branch there. "It receives thousands of patients every month. Moreover, the association has managed to acquire the consent of the biggest medical insurance company in Germany to pay for the costs of the treatment which usually lasts for a whole month," said Hani El-Nazer, professor of dermatology and head of the research team in Safaga. El-Nazer added that since there are at least 20 million people in Europe who suffer from the condition he expects Safaga to become one of the most important climatotherapy centres in the world within five years' time.

Safari tours are at present exclusive to the New Valley and fast becoming more popular. "Accommodation facilities are growing to meet the demand. The New Valley receives almost 40,000 tourists every year," said Ibrahim Hassan, tourist manager in the governorate. Next November, a three-star tourist camp and a five-star hotel with 102-room capacity will open at Kharga Oasis; a tourist village with 35 beds has already opened in Dakhla, and another tourist village will soon be operational in Farafra.

"Travellers will now be able to enjoy a seven-day safari, staying for a couple of days at different oases," Hassan said.

The participation of India at the IATM this year marked the beginning of a new phase of tourist cooperation with Egypt. A new agreement facilitating visas was described as "a welcome move," by Ved Gupta, head of the tourist office in India. "More Indians will be encouraged to visit Egypt," he said. Of India's estimated 15 million "wealthy" who go on vacations at least twice a year, 4,000 visit Egypt. "The number is still very humble compared to the potential," said Gupta but he puts this down to the fact that Egypt has rarely been marketed in India, a situation that Indian travel agents and the media feel could be remedied through promotional and cultural trips to Egypt. A large-scale campaign on Egypt is now being run on Duordarshan, the largest and most popular TV channel in India.

Waxing immortal in Helwan

With the Helwan Wax Museum soon to come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture, **Gihan Shahine** sees hope for the long-neglected exhibits



photos: Sherif Sonbol
Face-to-face with the past: Visitors rub shoulders with the elite from bygone eras at the Helwan Waxworks

"Amazing," a tourist gasps in excitement. Wax statues on show stare back at him, timidly, as if aware of their state of disrepair. But the humility does not quiet obliterate their charm. The tourist lingers an instant for another look, then falls in line with a guided tour. The guide proudly tells the visitors that he will take them back into the times of pharaohs and prophets, Crusaders and Mamelukes.

Many of the characters inhabiting the Helwan Wax Museum need serious plastic surgery. The greats of the past, hoping to impress even in effigy, are hampered somewhat by the shabbiness of their clothes and the occasionally missing body part. But the scene is still entertaining.

In one exhibit, 18th Dynasty Pharaoh Akhenaten stands with his beautiful wife Nefertiti and their three girls. His successor, the boy-king Tutankhamun and several royal maids loiter idly nearby.

History and legend mingle in waxed immortality; a pale-faced Cleopatra lounges on a couch, frozen in an eternal suicide scene, while the baby Moses is pulled from the waters of the Nile, days of prophecy and war still ahead. Nearby, the magnanimity of Saladin, warrior and medicine man, is depicted as he treats his crusading enemy, Richard the Lionheart.

Elsewhere, in a reconstruction of Cairo alleyways, a crowd is shown gathered around a rawi, or poet-singer. Women peep from behind their mashrabiyyas, or latticework window screens, to watch the performance. A saqqa, or water-seller, hobbles in the background, perpetually burdened, like a latter-day Sisyphus, by a bulging water sack.

"The museum teaches us a lot about Egypt's history," says Ahmed Saleh, an engineer who has just completed a tour with his wife and three children. "It records a lot of significant events; it certainly helps the kids know more about their ancestors."

Founded in 1934, the museum was the brainchild of Egyptian artist Fouad George Abdel-Malek, who studied wax moulding in England and France and worked for a while at Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum in London. The large garden of the museum, situated in a scenic part of Ain Helwan, contrasts with its rather cramped interior, where 116 statues compete for space in an area of 400 square metres.

It is sweltering inside. There are no air-conditioning units and the nine fans, some out of order, try desperately to keep the air circulating. Thankfully, the statues are chemically treated against heat.

"We have repeatedly reported the need for restoration, air conditioning and repair to the municipality, but nothing happened," says one museum official. The museum has been run by both the Helwan Municipality and Cairo Governorate and neither has been able to marshal the necessary funds for the establishment's upkeep.

The latest restoration work at the museum was in 1991. Mona Abu Zahra, head of the Wax Museum, was not pleased with the quality of that work. "The local government has no experience in the field, and so they assigned people who lacked the proper expertise to do the work." The restoration budget of LE2,000 was insufficient to hire any specialists. As one museum official noted, "The statues came out looking worse, as workers used gypsum to fix the broken parts."

A proper restoration job supervised, for example, by the Supreme Council of Antiquities, would cost about LE1 million, but such funds have never been forthcoming, the museum staff note somberly. Abu Zahra believes that, being a profit-making venture, the museum deserves better funding. "The museum is, in itself, a good source of income. Despite poor media coverage, many people, tourists, and school groups, come to visit the museum. Our revenue ranges between LE100 and LE250 per day, depending on the season."

But all is not doom and gloom at the waxworks. Following a recent media campaign to save the museum, Cairo Governorate has recently decided to cede control of the museum to the National Centre for Fine Arts, which is affiliated to the Ministry of Culture, and preliminary plans by the latter to upgrade the museum and expand it into a larger museum for Egyptian culture are in the pipeline.

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.
Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company

Buses travel to North/South Sinai
Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Qusseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410.

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Egyptian tourism on the Internet

Here are some useful addresses on the Internet, including tourism magazines, archaeology and travel agency programmes:

http:// www.idsc.gov.eg/links.htm is an address through which you can access other useful tourism addresses on the Internet. Here they are:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/tourism is the address of Egypt's Tourism Net which provides directories of Egypt's hotels, restaurants, cruise lines, travel agents, transportation companies and tourist attractions.

Egypt's tourism net is a part of many home pages (culture, health, environment, etc) created by the IDSC as a part of the nation's Information Highway.

http://163.121.10.41/tourism is the key to Egypt Has It All, where Egypt's tourist sites, such as the Red Sea, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, the Sinai, Alexandria, oases and ETA offices abroad are described. The magazine also contains colour photographs of Egypt.

http://www.memphis.edu/egypt/egypt.htm is the address of the University of Memphis, and describes their projects in Egypt.

http://www-ceg.ceg.vivc.edu/~haggag/travel.html is the address of Egypt's Tours and Travel, which organises packages for people who want to take quality tours. It is an Egyptian tour operator, which specialises in tours within Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East.

http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/7210 is the address of The Curse of the Pharaohs. It includes photographs of ancient tombs and temples.

http://www.ezy.be/horses is the address of The Arabian Horse Worldwide Guide. This guide aims to promote the world's most beautiful and versatile horse — the Arabian.

http://intercoz.com/egypt is a 2,000-page magazine, published by the Ministry of Tourism, where all Egyptian tourist sites are listed and described.

http://www.danum.com.eg/~city is the address of the magazine Cairo Scene, Cairo's first on-line art and entertainment guide. It is the most up-to-date source on where to go and what to do in Cairo. It has also sections for books and the latest CDs besides proposed places to visit like Wadi Rayan.

http://watt.seas.virginia.edu/~aoa5v is the site of Exodus Egypt, a daily site covering home news including political, social and cultural events.

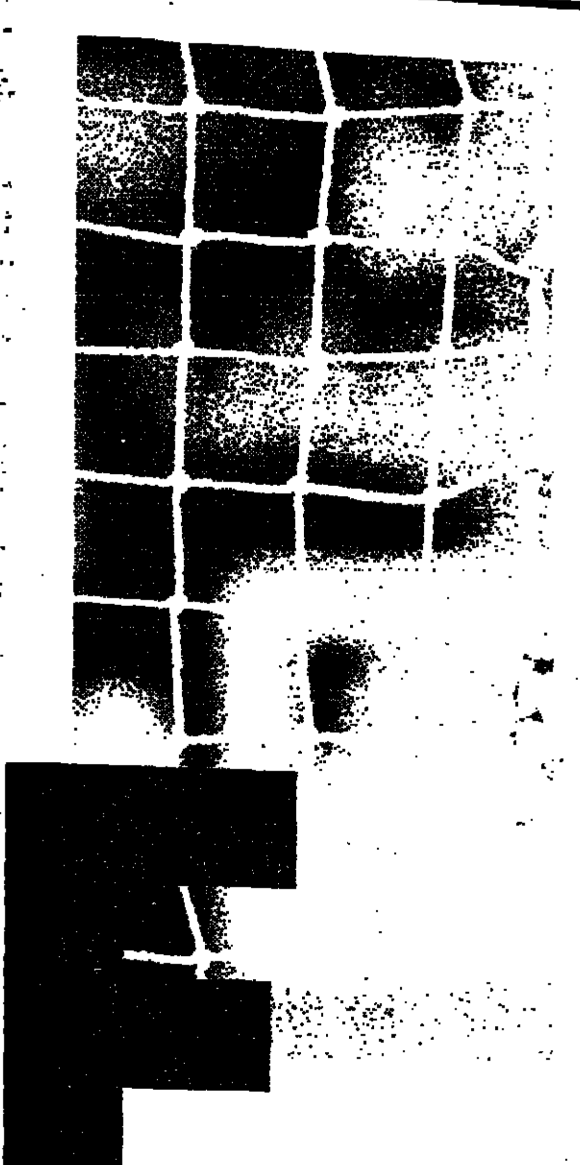




photo: Mohamed Wassim

Farewell Shobeir

Ahmed Shobeir, star-player for Egypt and Ahli for some 20 years, has decided to retire. The occasion was marked by great pomp and ceremony — and a victory for Ahli. **Abeer Anwar** unwinds the thread of an extraordinary history

Ahmed Shobeir, 37, has decided to put an end to his 20-year-long career in football while people will still remember him as a star. Since 1995, Shobeir has been sidelined by the national team, first under Dutch coach Nol De Ruitor, who preferred the goal-keeping skills of Essam El-Hadari, and then under German Reinne Holman. Shobeir also suffered a serious knee injury which kept him out for a long time. By the time he had regained his form, it was too late, and El-Hadari had definitively supplanted him.

Shobeir is a man of many titles. He played 315 national matches with Ahli in the league tournaments and African Championships. He also played 133 friendly matches. For eight years between 1987 and 1994, he was goalkeeper with the national team. He won the title of best African goalkeeper by keeping a clean sheet for his teams through an astonishing 114 matches — the only Egyptian goalkeeper ever to be awarded this distinction. He was also ranked third-best goalkeeper in the world in 1994. He played with the national team that took part in the World Cup in Italy in 1990. He was three-times Arab goalkeeper of the year in '87, '89 and '96; best Egyptian player in '83 and '96, and best Egyptian goalkeeper every year for 14 years from '84 to '96.

Shobeir was born one of six brothers to a humble family in Tanta. He only began to speak very late, and his parents were afraid he would be dumb. Though he did begin to speak later, he was an isolated child, whose best friend was the football — not a leather ball, but a *kora sharob*, which is made out of old rags stuffed into a sock. He would skip off school to play street soccer with his friends, and deliberately sought out other boys who were rich enough to have a proper ball.

The first thing Shobeir did when he had learned how to write was to mark on the door of his home: "Ahmed Shobeir, goalkeeper of Ahli and the national team". Many years later, this youthful prophecy would come true. At the age of 11, he started to play for the Tanta Workers' Club. Although his passion for football was all-consuming, goalkeeping was not in fact his first choice of career. "I didn't like goalkeeping," he told the *Weekly*. "I was only interested in scoring goals." But one day the goalkeeper broke his leg, and Shobeir had to stand in for him. Before he had had time to get his bearings in the goalmouth, he stopped a powerful shot, and found the rest of his team-mates cheering him. His destiny was sealed. He wanted to move to Tanta Club, but was refused due to his slim build and short height. "Then all of a sudden the coach changed," Shobeir recalls, "and they asked me to come and join the team. That was the start. All the doors that had been slammed shut started to open."

When he was still 16, Shobeir was already dreaming of playing for Ahli, who were the top team in Egypt at the time. By luck, one of his friends from Tanta had gone to play for Ahli. He asked him if he could help him get a place in the Ahli under-17s team. After passing a number of tests, he thus found himself in the hands of coach Amr Abul-Magd, who was to have a profound influence on Shobeir's life. Magd liked his style, and in August 1977, Ahmed Shobeir joined the juniors as goalkeeper.

He never looked back. Before long he had graduated to the senior team, and thence to the Egyptian national side. Wherever he went, the other players felt secure when they knew they had Shobeir behind them. Asked about the worst match in his life, Shobeir did not hesitate: Egypt against Tunisia in the Seoul Olympics qualifying rounds, when Egypt lost 1-0 to Tunisia after having looked certain to win. "I would like to erase that one goal from my mind, even though it was not my fault," Shobeir admitted.

At his testimonial match, Shobeir began by congratulating former Ahli goalkeepers Adel Heikel, Essam Abdel-Moneim and Mustafa Kamel Mansour. A number of actors were also there to present their congratulations, including Adel Emam, who was on the pitch to kick-off the match between Ahli Jeddah and Egypt's Ahli. Adel Emam then promptly showed himself the red card and left the field to the real players. After the match, Ahmed Shobeir called on all those present to show their respect and gratitude by giving blood. Many fans responded to his call. "We had 15,000 donors before and during the match," said Shobeir. The idea of a blood donation had been suggested to him by his best friend Hossam Killini.

The match itself was an opportunity for German coach Holman to help his players overcome the disappointment of losing to Qena, a club new to the league tournament this season. It was also a chance to try out players recovering from injury such as Ahmed Felix, along with new players and promising juniors. Ahli Jeddah of is one of the best teams in Saudi Arabia and were delighted to be invited to take part in the farewell tribute to Shobeir, who is loved by players all over the world. The testimonial was played in a packed Cairo Stadium in front of 90,000 fans. Hossam Hassan scored a hat-trick to carry Ahli to a 3-2 victory over Jeddah.

In Shobeir's opinion, goalkeepers ought to be talented and tall and should train a lot. He agrees that other players — strikers, midfielders, defenders even — are better placed to further their careers. He himself was offered a contract to play for England's Everton, but refused to leave Egypt. Even though other famous players such as Bobby Charlton and Zoof did not quit until they were well on into their forties, Shobeir is unrepentant at calling it a day at the tender age of 37: "It is the tradition in Egypt. Officials always think the player is old and doesn't have anything more to give, which isn't true." Forced increasingly to sit on the bench with the substitutes, he felt he was betraying his long experience and talents. "It is better to quit while your image is intact and you are loved by everybody. That is what pleases me best: that I am loved by everyone. The stands are packed — that is the proof."

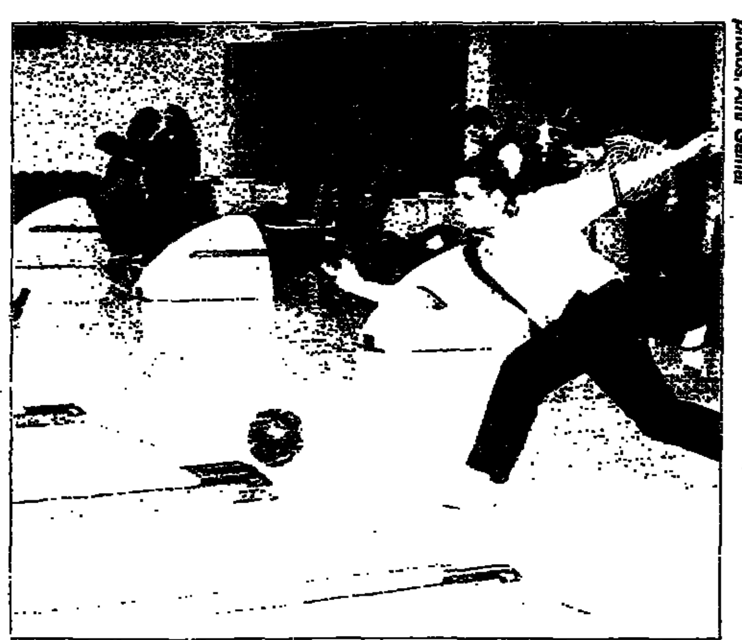
As to his future, besides his post as an administrator at the Al-Ahram Organisation, Shobeir is still trying to decide between working as a coach or going into management with Ahli Club and saying farewell to the pitch forever.

Bowling under the stars

THE EGYPTIAN organising committee of the 33rd AMF Bowling World Cup, which will be held in Cairo from 15 to 22 November, have received the approval of the head of the World Federation Jerry Quening to hold the championship finals in the open air on the Pyramids Plateau. This will be the first time Egypt has hosted a World Bowling Cup and the first time an international bowling match will have been played in the open air. Head of the organising committee Amr Kamel said the Egyptian Federation has recruited expert technicians to ensure that this unprecedented final will go ahead without any hiccups. There will be two lanes at the final, and stands for 1,200 spectators. Kamel said the whole operation will be under the direct supervision of Don Atkinson, the World Federation's technical expert. Mr. Atkinson will arrive in Cairo on 9 November.

Egyptian Prime Minister Dr. Kamal El-Ganzouri is the "guardian angel" of the AMF Bowling World Cup that will be held in the newly-inaugurated International Bowling Center in Nasr City. Heba Atef and Mohamed Ibrahim will be representing Egypt in the championship.





photos: Amr Gamal

Barada's back?

With the star still liable to turn up on the day with a sick note, Faizy and Shabana may find themselves representing Egypt in the team event at the World Championship in Malaysia. Or is he just calling our bluff? **Eman Abdel-Moeti** assesses the extent of the damage

This year's World Squash *Championship* is being held over two weeks, from 1 to 15 November. The individual event occupies the first week, up until the ninth of November, and with Jansher Khan absent, the way is open for a number of star squash players to stake their claim to the Pakistani star's succession. *Favourite to replace* him is Scotland's Peter Nicol, world-ranked 3, who beat Jansher in the final of the Al-Ahram International. World-ranked 2 Rodney Eyles, although one of the front runners on points, has struggled recently to hold on to his ranking, with a series of upsets in recent competitions, and looks a rather doubtful contender. Jonathan Power, world-ranked 4, who met Khan in the Egyptian Open, is thus joint favourite with Nicol to reach the finals.

England's *Simon* Parke is world-ranked 5, followed by Egypt's Ahmed Barada who has been pursuing Jansher from tournament to tournament, though so far he has failed to emerge victorious from *their* encounters. Barada claims his chances are still weakened by a back injury from which he has not fully recovered, but this argument is open to question, since his performance before and after has been remarkably consistent throughout the Egyptian Open, the Kuwait Open, and the Pakistani Open — where, as usual, he lost to Jansher. Barada's true condition is difficult to determine, and some commentators are suspicious that *he is simply* talking it up so as to damp down excessive expectations in the run-up to the tournament.

A total prize money of $150,000 for the individual event and Jansher's *absence are two* big motivating factors, and a fierce battle seems guaranteed as many pretenders seek to claim the title for themselves.

Other players representing Egypt in the individual event, all of them hoping to better their ranking, are: Amir Wagih (world-ranked 21), Omar El-Brollossy (world-ranked 22), Ahmed Faizy, Amr Shabana, Mohamed Medhat and Karim El-Mistikawi.

For the last two weeks there have been heated *discussions* as to who will represent Egypt in the team event. National team coach Ahmed Safwat finally put an end to the speculation by announcing that the three principal players would be selected on the basis of their world ranking. Logically, this would mean the line-up would be Ahmed Barada, Amir Wagih and Omar El-Brollossy. As for the substitute player, Safwat said he would make the choice himself according to how players performed during the training period. Thus Amr Shabana, who has been climbing up the world ranking at a giddy pace over the last year, *found himself selected in preference to* Ahmed Faizy, whose position on points has been up and down ever since he won the World Junior Championship. However, both players will travel with the Egyptian team, and it is not impossible that one of them may play at least one match, if Barada does turn out to have trouble with his back.

Egypt will be defending third place with the same line-up as at the 1995 World Championships in Egypt. England are the defending champions and will pose a serious threat to Egyptian hopes of bettering last year's result. The Australian team are second favourites, but they seem much less intimidating since Rodney Eyles, their best player, was defeated by Barada (though Wagih or Brollossy might not present the world no 2 with so many problems). Jansher's absence puts Pakistan in a difficult position, and they are ranked only fifth among the Championship favourites, Canada making fourth with Jonathan Power on the team. In the longer term, the gap between the senior and the junior Pakistani players may *well affect the country's world ranking.*

For the first time, the Egyptian Squash Federation will also be taking a promising young referee along with them, as part of a campaign *to raise the standards of Egyptian* refereeing. Ahmed Nasser has been chosen to join the Egyptian delegation alongside head of the Federation Hossam Nasser, and national team coach Ahmed Safwat.

Golf

THE EGYPTIAN Golf Federation held an important meeting last week at which it was agreed to host a number of domestic and international competitions so as *to promote* the game in the country. Headed by Khaled Abu-Taleb, the federation board agreed to launch two golf schools, one at Gezira Club, and the other at Sporting Club in Alexandria. The board members also approved *associate membership for all golf courses in* Egypt and did not rule any of them out as venues for future international competitions. Meanwhile, the first national golf championship ended last week at Sporting Club in Alexandria, with *club member* Amr *Abul-Ela* taking first place.

Taekwondo

THE WORLD Taekwondo Championship is due to take place in Hong Kong from 8 to 24 November. The eight members of the Egyptian team will be Talat Mabruk, Mohamed Abdel-Alim, Mahmoud Shalabi, Tamer Abdel-Moneim, Ahmed Zahran, Ahmed Adel, and Yehia Allam. The women's team will have only four members, and Marwa Elhami, world title-holder in her weight category, will not be among them as she has to sit for a medical school exam. Instead, Egypt will be represented by Inas Ghanem, Shaima Sobhi, Bassant Nabil and Sabrin Abdel-Hamid.

Fishing

THE FIFTH International Fishing Championship will be held at Sharm El-Sheikh between 26 November and 1 December. So far 15 clubs from 15 different countries have submitted applications to compete, but the Egyptian Federation is still optimistic the final number of participants will not be less than 25 as last year.

Weightlifting

THE NATIONAL weightlifting team, a byword for ambition, will be going on a camp in Syria to prepare for the World Championships to be held in Thailand from 3 to 15 December. The men are to field a full team, but there will only be two Egyptian women. Samir Hanna, technical coach of the national team, said there is a strong possibility that the men's team will be placed in the top ten teams in the world, which would *qualify* them for the 2000 Olympics. As for the women, he said that the sport was new to Egypt, and it was best not to try and field too extended a team at what was still an early stage in the sport's development.

Kung fu

ITALY is hosting the World Kung Fu Championships in Rome until 9 November. An Egyptian team is participating in two events, in which they hope to achieve progressive ranks. Their Chinese coach had hoped the team would be able to gain experience abroad before confronting the challenge of the World Championship, but lack of money confined them to domestic competitions. However, he said the team are remarkable already for their bravery, which will stand them in good stead however tough their opponents may be.

Tennis

THE EGYPTIAN umpire Wael Abbas was awarded the silver medal at an international third-level judging course held from 18 to 21 October in Singapore. This now qualifies him to judge international tournaments. Abdel-Fattah Moussa of the Egyptian Tennis Federation said that Wael's promotion to international judge will spare the federation thousands of pounds usually allocated for the accommodation of international referees when the Satellite tournament is held in Egypt. About 18 other judges from Australia, New Zealand, United Arab Emirates, China, Japan, Korea, and Indonesia attended *the same course.*

PETE Sampras won his seventh title of the season when he beat 12th-seeded Jonas Bjorkman of Sweden 6-3, 4-6, 6-3, 6-1 in the final of the Paris Indoor Open. Bjorkman *had his chances early on as both players struggled to hold* their serve, but Sampras came back strongly in the later sets, despite continuing discomfort in his right shoulder and upper arm, which meant he needed painkillers to get *through Sunday's match*

Maradona retires

RUMOURS which continued to dog Diego Maradona *after a recent negative drugs test* have finally driven him out of football. He announced his retirement last week — though it will not be the first time he has "retired", only to be dragged back into the game.

"The footballer in me has come to an end. Nobody's sadder than I am," said the former Argentine captain, speaking on the eve of his 37th birthday, in a telephone interview with the TV channel America 2.

"With all the pain in my soul, the moment has come to announce my retirement. Tomorrow will be my saddest birthday," he added, also saying he had promised his father last month that he would quit the next time rumours began to circulate about his drug habit.

Maradona, who has announced his retirement several times before and threatened to quit on countless occasions, played Sunday in Boca Junior's 2-1 victory against arch-rivals River Plate, a result which propelled the team to the top of the Argentine first division table.

Basketball

THE NATIONAL Basketball League got under way recently for the 10 participating teams: Zamalek, Ahli, Gezira, Ittihad of Alexandria, Sporting Club, Tanta, El-Shams, Moqaweloon, Aluminium, and El-Sharqiya for Smoking Industry.

This week is the third of nine devoted to the first round, which will be followed by nine for the second round. Then the teams will be divided into two groups on points. The five leading teams will play three matches in a round-robin tournament that will also be decided on points. The winner will be the Egyptian champion, and perhaps, for once, go on to even bigger things. Up till now, *an Egyptian team has never taken* part in a world championship match or in any top-flight international competition. One can understand this, though, when one sees Egyptian clubs or even the national team take part in Arab and *African championships, where they* tend to win by the skin of their teeth, determination making up for the lack of skill — that is, when they do not lose miserably...

The third week of the National League witnessed an important clash between two of the four leading senior teams. Gezira and Ahli are archrivals with a long history of success in both league and cup competitions. This week Ahli beat Gezira 81-75 in a strange match that often looked more like a warm-up session than a league game. Both teams passed well, but somewhat aimlessly, even the best movements rarely finding their way to the net. Paradoxically, this lack of focus only seemed to increase the tension for players and fans alike. Gezira blamed their loss on the general state of chaos reigning at the Club due *to the elections. The players* had slacked on training and preparation for the league in order to concentrate on promoting the candidacy of their friend, Ahmed Abul-Futouh. Although the club regulations state *that members* of the governing committee do not have the right to combine their official functions with a place as a player on one of the club teams, Ahmed Abul-Futouh was granted exemption from this decree for reasons that are not known. Yet despite his exemption, Gezira still lost to Ahli.

The other four matches played this week were not as significant as this clash of Titans. Zamalek beat Tanta 94-55. Moqaweloon beat Sporting 80-46. El-Sharqiya for Smoking Industry beat El-Shams Club 66-65, and Ittihad of Alexandria beat Aluminium Club 98-56.

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Al-Ahram Weekly

Nagi Kamel:

A tall, gaunt, silent man, he slips inconspicuously in and out of rooms. His voice is a whisper, lost somewhere in his beard. He exudes melancholy although, as one of our most popular caricaturists, his calling is to make people smile



Master of some

It is easier to pull the proverbial tooth than to speak to Nagi about himself. Not only is he reticent, he seems unabashedly bored with the task of sorting out biographical details. Only casually does he mention the fire that destroyed his house and in which he lost all his possessions — and almost his life. "The cheap cigarettes I used to smoke... they contained strange little bits of wood which fall off the tip at the most awkward moments." In this case one of the bits slipped unnoticed between the cushions of his favourite armchair as he was getting ready to go to bed. His family was away on that particular night. He woke up a couple of hours later, choking on the heavy smoke coming from the living room. He stumbled out and managed to reach the garden, but not before sustaining severe burns to many parts of his body. He is still repairing the house.

Although Nagi is less than loquacious when it comes to personal milestones, however, he will wax lyrical about his work as a multi-talented artist whose choices have been often guided by practical considerations.

His very first serious artistic attempt revolves around sculpture. "There was an earthquake when I was around 12," he says. "We lived in Shubra. One of the hooks which usually held the shutters open was wrenched out of the wall and my father inserted a piece of rock between the shutter and the wall to keep the shutter from closing until proper repairs could be carried out. I was fascinated by the small rock. It reminded me of Fouad Serageddin's face. It became a sort of obsession, and, one day, I refused to go visiting some relatives with my parents. I wanted to stay home, alone. As soon as the family was gone, I retrieved the rock and started sculpting it. When it was finished, I took it to my school and entered it in the artistic competition. It won an award." Nagi remains lost in thought. "*Wizaret El-Ma'aref* (the then Ministry of Education) kept it and I never saw it again," he says finally.

Sculpture has kept its fascination, although he was to try his hand at other media. During his years at El-Nil Secondary School, he concentrated on pencil drawings, which were immediately noticed by Youssef Raafat, a gifted artist and teacher, says Nagi. "He told me that I was gifted. He also told me that my drawings were called caricatures, and that later I should enroll at the Faculty of Fine Arts." At one point he was moved to Fustat Secondary School, and there he met an art teacher who introduced him to colours. Soon he could add oil painting to his many skills.

Nagi was impatient. He worked hard, studying at home to skip a year and reach the goal which lay ahead a little faster. He wanted to sail as quickly as possible through his formal education and towards the artistic career which beckoned. At the Faculty of Fine Arts he enrolled in the sculpture department "because I loved raw materials, like children love ice cream;" but he continued to draw caricatures. He wanted to eat the lumps of clay, the chunks of rock and wood that came alive under his fingers; but meanwhile, he kept busy with the pencil. For him the two skills were complementary, anyway: "Although cartoonists and designers do not necessarily sculpt, drawing is essential to the sculptor. Strangely though, I found that great cartoonists are often sculptors, like Zohdi and El-Segini, for instance."

While he was still at school, a number of Nagi's caricatures were published in *Al-Hilal* and the evening paper *Al-Missa*. In 1957, he graduated with highest honours from the Faculty of Fine Arts and was awarded a two-year scholarship to work in Luxor. For these two years he forgot about cartoons, giving all his attention to the work at hand. He received a merit award from Abdel-Nasser for his research project, a multi-media composition representing Egyptian civilisation as an indivisible compound of Pharaonic, Coptic and Muslim influences.

Luxor was not only a unique experience for Nagi-the-sculptor. It was there that he discovered what was going to become a new, very keen interest in his life. "There was a group of Germans who were involved in producing a huge documentary on the Nile. They were shooting in Luxor at the time. When they saw that I was living in a house of mud bricks on the banks of the river, using the black silt I extracted from the Nile with my hands for my sculptures, and firing them in a kiln I had constructed myself, they asked me if I would be willing to feature in the film, in my real-life role. This was my first encounter with the camera. Part of the film was shown in Cairo on 14 May 1964, the day on which the Nile's course was changed — the whole documentary was too long, four and a half hours of film — and Kamal Attiya, who saw it, thought that I had a photogenic face. He offered me a part in his film *Ma'a Al-Nass* with Samira Ahmed and Emad Hamdi."

Nagi's face is suddenly animated, alive; the monotone in which he has described the events of his "tedious life" is relieved by this new interest as he reminisces. He must have loved acting, although he abruptly gave it up in 1972. Coming to terms with his *violon d'Ingres*? He had been tricked, he says, by Hassan Fouad, chief editor of *Sabah El-Kheir*, into appearing in Youssef Chahine's *Al-Nass wal-Nil*, starring Soad Hosni and Mahmoud El-Meligi. "Hassan told me to go to the Semiramis and draw some sketches of the people who were milling around the hotel. There were people of every nationality there, and I was busy capturing their various features when I noticed that there were cameras all around. Soon Mahmoud El-Meligi arrived and, thinking that I was in the way of the cameramen, I started to withdraw, whereupon Youssef Chahine told me to stay put. I was part of the film."

On the fourth day of filming, however, Nagi suddenly remembered Kamel El-Shenawi. The poet, meeting him for the first time, had learned that he was not only a cartoonist, a sculptor and a painter, but that he was not averse to composing the occasional melody on the *nay* (flute). He had commented: "*Sab' sanayi' wal-bakht dayi'*" (roughly, Jack of all trades and master of none). This had piqued Nagi at the time, but he had quickly shrugged the remark off. Now the popular saying was coming back to haunt him at the time when he was maybe about to embark on a fourth — or fifth — career. As Chahine began explaining his role — an art teacher instructing Soad Hosni on the eve of her departure to Moscow — he simply walked out, vowing to concentrate solely on art. "It was not my scene, I realised, and, although my decision angered Hassan Fouad, I stuck to art."

He was a well-known cartoonist by then, working for *Rose El-Youssef* and *Sabah El-Kheir*. His caricature of married life — for a while, he targeted newlyweds specifically — were already famous. Discussing cartoons from this period, Charles Vial writes in *Caricature* (Cairo, 1997): "Nagi Kamel reminds one of Peynet in the slightly affected poetry of his drawings and the frequent presence of newlyweds. The wedding day allows him to picture pretty brides in white veils, with large puzzled eyes. Their slim companions, sporting delicate moustaches, have style. The wedding day, however, gives him a chance to hint at the difficulty of the years ahead."

In one cartoon which appeared in *Al-Ahram* (17 May 1982), "a bunch of superb green onions make up the bride's bouquet," while in another (in *Sabah El-Kheir*, on 25 March 1965), as the wedding guests pay their compliments, "the husband tells his new wife, who is still in her bridal gown: 'Go stand in the queue at the cooperative while I go home'."

"However," continues Vial, "one should not be fooled by the 'cuteness' of the composition. Nagi can be hard, ferocious even. Especially on wedding days." In a cartoon which appeared in *Sabah El-Kheir* in 1965, "the husband tells his young bride, who cannot believe her ears, 'You couldn't wait to get married. Well, then, we are married. Excuse me now, but I have other things to attend to!' Another new husband suggests to his wife that, 'in view of the housing problems, why don't we each live in our father's house?'. (*Sabah El-Kheir*, 18 March 1965)."

Newlyweds, however, are not the only target of Nagi's biting humour, writes Vial. Large families, domestic rows (husbands throwing their wives out of windows are a prominent theme), the inhabitants of the chic quarters of Zamalek and Garden City... all get their fair share. He does not even spare the omnipresent beggars. In *Al-Ahram* of 30 March 1982, he pictures a grouchy 'fake' beggar having a little snack. To the generous almsgiver, he responds in the tradition of the consummate bureaucrat: 'Can't you see I'm busy? Come back tomorrow.'

A career as a well-known cartoonist is not enough for Nagi, however. "I sought work in journalism because it was a way of earning a living, the road to some sort of financial security. A sculptor cannot guarantee that he will sell his work unless he is given a commission." Yet a commission is exactly what he received recently when Ahmed Nawwar chose him to design a wall medal for the Nubian Museum. "I put a lot of research into it," says Nagi, "because I like to do murals and wall medals. I executed the Ahmed Shawqi commemorative medal which is now in his museum, as well as that of Boutros Ghali. I did the mosaic mural of the *Rose El-Youssef* offices on Qasr El-Aini Street. This, however, required research in the history of the area and I consulted the archives of the Save Nubian Antiquities Fund, at their office in Bab El-Louq. Finally I found what I wanted. I started working on a composition which included the crown of the kings of Nubia, the Nile, the desert and the features of a symbolic Nubian woman. I cast the medal in bronze."

Nagi pauses, apparently overcome by a sudden attack of depression — that of the artist who has just finished a task to which he has devoted his undivided attention for too long. He insists that he could never have achieved the perfection of detail and polish which characterised the final product without the help of his friend and colleague Adib Mikhail, who sculpts steel and put his state-of-the-art metal workshop at Nagi's disposal. Yet Nagi will go back to clay, which is both cheap and durable. There is a hint of weariness in his voice. Is it bitterness at life's injustices, or simply his rebellious nature, in which another caustic brainwave brews?

Profile by Fayza Hassan and Samir Sobhi

